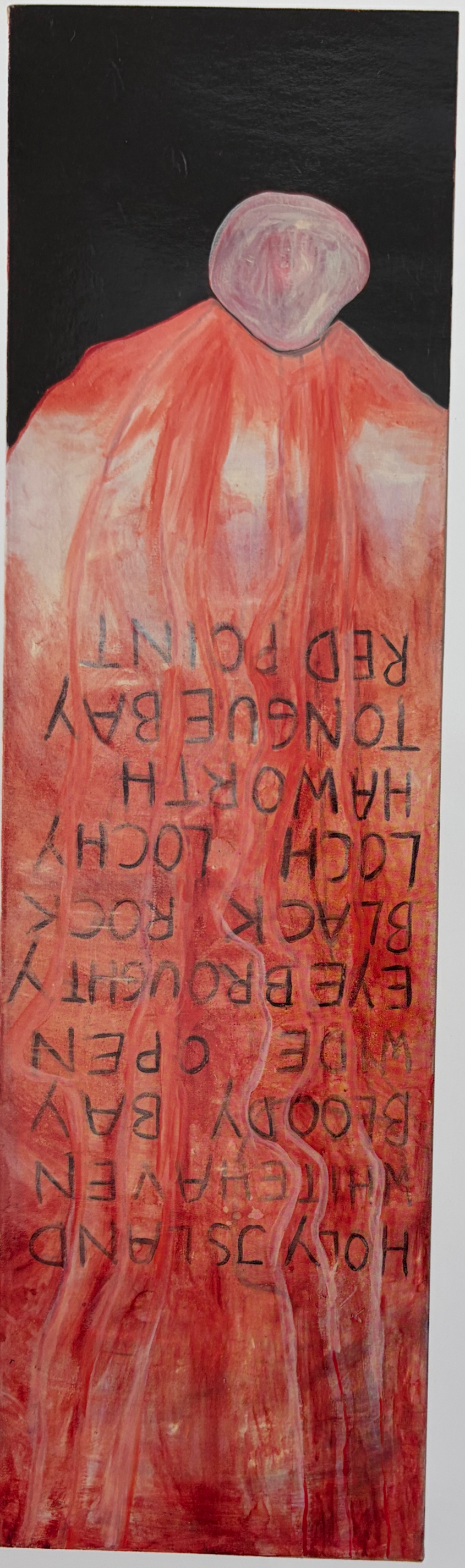

TOUR DE MADAME

JUTTA KOETHER

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FOREWORD

Above all, Jutta Koether is a painter. This statement may seem surprising in view of the sheer diversity of her oeuvre, which comprises performances, music, and texts ranging from the literary to the theoretical and the critical. But the exhibition *Tour de Madame* demonstrates that painting is the vantage point in this artistic landscape from which all her utterances, her expressions, can be ordered. At the same time, the exhibition represents a grand tour, a *tour d'horizon*, a *tour de plaisir* through this landscape, on which we learn that Koether thinks about painting differently than many of her contemporaries do—not as an isolated, historical phenomenon, but as an open visual plane or stage. This is why it occupies such a central position in her oeuvre. The autonomy of this kind of painting is not situated in its medial immanence but in the perception of the canvas as a membrane: its relationship to the outside outweighs the discursive dogmas of art criticism. Thus, Jutta Koether's painting often embodies the very thing that seems to have eluded painting over the past thirty-five years—a capacity to tell stories, to seek out excess and pleasure as opposed to mere analysis, and in the process, to generate positive and constructive references to certain traditions in painting.

Encompassing around 150 artworks made between 1982 and 2018, *Tour de Madame* provides the first systematic and chronological survey of Koether's painting. It starts with the small-format paintings that arose within the context of the Cologne neo-expressionist scene. They are the outriders of an upheaval that affected the art milieu and artistic methods alike: in 1987, Koether began to use red as the dominant color range in her paintings. According to the context, red can stand for pain, shame, hysteria, intensity, aggression, provocation, makeup, desire, femininity. On the basis of this, in particular after her relocation to New York at the beginning of the 1990s, a series of intense and richly thematic compositions arose, densely interweaving miscellaneous motifs from the worlds of popular culture, literature, and art history. Following her work as a pop journalist, Koether's approach at the beginning of the 2000s veered increasingly toward performance and music, culminating in jet-black canvases and assemblages featuring memorabilia from the Punk and Noise countercultures. These threads are developed further in paintings such as the 2011 "The Seasons" cycle, for example, which is based on compositions by Nicolas Poussin. In such series, Koether brings canonical works by historical artists together with contemporary visual worlds to create sensual and shameless appropriations that are at once homage, opposition, and jouissance. *Tour de Madame* concludes with a fifteen-part series of paintings devised specially for the exhibition, which is a reply—both in arrangement and in format—to Cy Twombly's monumental "Lepanto" cycle (2001) in the Museum Brandhorst. By demonstrating Koether's salient motifs and the overall dynamic of her career, this idiosyncratic retrospective captures *her* battle with painting and art history.

Many of the works on display in the exhibition—and above all, the mostly unknown early canvases—are serendipities of sorts, as these paintings have either never been seen before or not been since they were first shown to the public. By bringing together all of Koether's disparate work groups, we are able to appreciate her body of work in terms of its historical significance: as an ambitious attempt to posit a counterhistory to the (male-dominated) canons of modernism and postmodernism. Her recourses to Poussin, Vincent van Gogh, Georgia O'Keeffe, and others are not historicizing reconfirmations, but instead contemporize a history of art, of which she self-assuredly considers herself a part. The overall arrangement of the works in *Tour de Madame* demonstrates that painting is but one medium among many that Koether has mastered. More importantly, the systematic and consistent nature of her oeuvre leaves us in no doubt that, above all else, Jutta Koether is one of the most important German painters in recent decades.

Tour de Madame is an extraordinary exhibition project in every regard, and the result of a shared commitment on the part of the Museum Brandhorst and Mudam Luxembourg to Koether's work. These complex artworks have presented our two museums with several new challenges. For this reason, our heartfelt thanks are due to the teams at Museum Brandhorst, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, and Mudam Luxembourg for their endurance, persistence, and attention to detail in producing the exhibition. We would like to thank Elisabeth Bushart, the head conservator at Museum Brandhorst, and her team: Iris Masson, Heide Skowranek, and Michaela Tischer, supported by Cathrin Paul and Manuela Wiesend, as well as the conservator for time-based media, Andreas Weißer. We are also most grateful to Wolfgang Wastian, head of the museum's Exhibitions and Technical Department, and his colleagues Stephen Crane, Adrian Keleti, Norbert Schölzel, and Cordula Schieri, supported by Andreas Klare, Ralf Kreßner, and Heiner Petersen. Furthermore, we would like to thank Simone Kober, the registrar at the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, who coordinated and managed the loans and transportation of artworks with foresight and exceptional professionalism. Particular thanks are due to Renate Blaffert and Elke Schütze from the Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation. In her role as assistant to the director, Elke Schütze has capably and sagaciously accompanied the countless preparatory stages. Mareike Hetschold, team assistant at Museum Brandhorst, deserves special recognition for her tremendous support in a variety of matters involving interdepartmental liaisons. Thanks are due to Gregor Lindermayr, head of Local Administration, Sylvia Marx and Stephanie Niederalt, deputy heads of Central Services, and their colleagues for their administrative supervision. We would also like to acknowledge Gabriele Prager from Finance and Accounts for her valuable professional guidance whenever required. We are also grateful to Tine Nehler, Sarah Stratenwerth, and Elisabeth Strobel for their commitment and hard work in the Press Department, Barbara Siebert, Katarina Jelic, Nadia Khatschi-Barnstein, and Anja Kiendl for their perfect organization and supervision of the accompanying events, as well as Jochen

Meister and his team for finely tailoring the art-education program to the exhibition. With consummate professionalism, wonderful creativity, and prodigious commitment, Regina Bertsch designed and published a drawing booklet for children and adults with Anne Funck, Nadine Kuffner, and Carla Nagel. We should also mention the supportive collaboration in the preparation of this catalogue with the Photography Department of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen under the stewardship of Haydar Koyupinar with special commitment by Margarita Platis, together with Sibylle Forster, Johannes Haslinger, and Nicole Wilhelms.

Jutta Koether's work is exuberant in the best sense of the word—it proliferates through an impressive variety of thematic questions and forms of representation. It is, therefore, all the more pleasing to be able to augment the exhibition and catalogue with a series of events conceived by the artist in conjunction with the Münchner Kammerspiele and the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich. Our appreciation goes to Matthias Lilienthal, Christoph Gurk, and Jenny Bohn from the Münchner Kammerspiele, as well as Dieter Rehm, Maria Muhle, and Florian Pumhösl from the Akademie der Bildenden Künste for providing a stage on which to showcase the energetic exchange and interplay between painting, music, performance, theory, and literature in Koether's rich practice. We would like to thank each one of them most warmly.

The fact that a project of this scope could be attempted in the first place is a product of the generous funding provided by our main sponsor, the German Federal Cultural Foundation. We are indebted to Hortensia Völckers, the Foundation's Artistic Director and a member of its governing board, as well as the Head of General Project Funding, Marie Cathleen Haff, and her team. Special thanks are likewise due to our main contact there, Kristin Duda, for constantly keeping an open mind about the specific requirements and concerns of our exhibition project. We are most grateful to Pictet & Cie (Europe) S.A. for their financial support. This also holds for PIN. Freunde der Pinakothek der Moderne e.V., which has been closely affiliated with Museum Brandhorst for many years and generously supported the instigation, organization, and completion of this ambitious project and its accompanying program.

Operated by the Free State of Bavaria and part of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Museum Brandhorst has consistently pursued an intensive and creative program of exhibitions ever since its foundation. A fundamental, helpful, and inspirational aspect of this endeavor has been a magnificent partnership: We are delighted to be able to work alongside and together with the Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, whose long-standing collecting guarantees that works by Jutta Koether will be on public display at Museum Brandhorst in the future. We would like to thank Udo Brandhorst most warmly for this.

The exhibition at Mudam Luxembourg is the result of the tremendous dedication and enthusiasm of all the museum staff. We would especially like to thank Clément Minighetti, chief curator, and Julia Wack, registrar, for their invaluable curatorial assistance on the presentation of the exhibition in its second iteration in Luxembourg, along with the museum's expert installation and technical teams led by Louis Bestgen, Véronique de Alzua, and Thierry Gratien. We are grateful to Germain Kerschen and his communication and press team, Julie Jephos and Magali Weirich, as well as to Pascale Staes and Laura Zaccaria for their involvement in the preparation of this publication. We also wish to acknowledge Nadine Erpelding, Anna Loporcaro, and their colleagues for the rich program of educational and public events conceived in response to Jutta Koether's extraordinarily generative oeuvre.

We are delighted and feel both privileged and honored that private and public lenders have been willing to part with their valuable works for the duration of the exhibition. Our special thanks are due to Murray Abramson, the Kenneth Aidekman Family Collection, Thomas Borgmann, Stefania Bortolami (Bortolami, New York), Daniel Buchholz and Christopher Müller (Galerie Buchholz Berlin/Cologne/New York), Emanuela Campoli and Gil Presti (Campoli Presti, London/Paris), Ioannis Christoforakos, Paul Ettlinger, Heather Flow, the Guilbaud Collection Martinique, the Hessel Museum Collection (Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York), the HMBT Collection, John Kelsey and Emily Sundblad (Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York/Los Angeles), MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main (represented by Susanne Pfeffer), mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Vienna (represented by Karola Kraus), Friedrich Petzel, Francesca Pia (Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich), Christoph Pracht, Jean-Edouard van Praet, Clayton Press and Gregory Linn, Eleanor Heyman Propp, Stéphane Ribordy, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (represented by Jan Willem Sieburgh), Edmundo Tonconogy, and all the other lenders who prefer to remain anonymous.

Jutta Koether's gallerists were on hand with their knowledge, expertise, and experience throughout the preparatory phase of the exhibition and were a great help. First and foremost, thanks are due to Daniel Buchholz and Christopher Müller from the Galerie Buchholz, assisted most energetically by Anna Dobrucki, who was especially helpful during the processing and classification of the works. Under Galerie Buchholz's aegis, it was possible to photograph and systematize the majority of the works. The gallery also provided generous assistance with regard to the prodigious expense involved in the transportation logistics. Likewise, a debt of thanks is due to Stefania Bortolami, Claire Bergeal, Kristian Laudrup, and Rosalie Szeto at Galerie Bortolami for their research on Koether's exhibitions in New York during the 1990s; to Emanuela Campoli, Gil Presti, Cora Muennich, and Caroline Marceron at Galerie Campoli Presti; to Francesca and Noëlle Pia and Michelle Dorsch at Galerie Francesca Pia; and, last but not least, to John Kelsey, Emily Sundblad, Elsa Brute de Rémur, Jelena Kristic and Emily Wang at Reena Spaulings Fine Art. All have generously helped with the production and preparation of the illustrations and the completion of *Tour de Madame* itself. As well as to the galleries, we are also grateful to all the

institutions and individuals who have kindly enabled us to include new pictorial material in the catalogue. Special thanks are due in particular to Kenneth Aidekman, Gabriella Bleich-Rossi, Thomas Borgmann, Ioannis Christoforakos, Paul Ettlinger, Tappan Heher and Jean-Edouard van Praet, the HMBT Collection, Hans-Jörg Mayer and the Nagel Draxler Gallery (Berlin/Cologne), Clayton Press and Gregory Linn together with the photographer Oskar Landi, and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

Thanks to all this enthusiastic collaboration and commitment, we have been able to produce this exhibition catalogue, which provides a seminal and wide-ranging appraisal of Koether's work from the 1980s to the present. The chronologically ordered plates section and the detailed essays enable the reader to trace Koether's overall artistic development and give an overview of the relationships between her different projects and groups of works. We would like to thank everyone involved in this publication for their tireless effort, and want to express our admiration for the contributors to this catalogue, namely Manuela Ammer, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Julia Gelshorn, Branden W. Joseph, Michael Sanchez, and Anne M. Wagner, and their insightful, rigorous, and seminal essays, which illuminate new facets of Koether's work. The extraordinarily elaborate research involved in compiling the bibliography, which encompasses, among other things, Koether's collected articles and reviews for the magazines *SPEX* and *Artscribe*, themselves notoriously difficult to access, has been conducted with laudable patience and attention to detail by Mareike Hetschold and Kirsten Storz, assisted by Robert Hamacher. Our thanks also goes to Marta Zanoni, from *Flash Art*, and to Arno Raffeiner and Annika Reith, from *SPEX*, for opening their archives to us.

We would also like to express our thanks to all our translators for their sterling work: Timothy Connell (Gelshorn, Kröner), Ishbel Flett (Hochdörfer), Christian Höller (Buchloh, Joseph, Wagner), Bronwen Saunders (Ammer), Anja Schulte and Gaby Gehlen (Sanchez). We are enormously indebted to our copy editors: James Camp, Ursula Fethke, Claire Lehmann, Jessica Loudis, and Friedrich Tietjen, the latter's expert critical eye making an important contribution to the book. Joseph Logan and Katy Nelson from Joseph Logan Design are responsible for the graphic design of this wonderful catalogue. In an intensive exchange with the artist, Joseph Logan teased out the characteristics of each series of works with great precision and care. We would like to thank him most warmly for his efforts, as well as Jutta Koether herself, whose enthusiasm and commitment throughout has propelled the work on the catalogue.

Special thanks are due to Kirsten Storz, who, as curatorial assistant, has been in charge of the book's production and the organization of the exhibition. Her indefatigable commitment and brilliance has been integral to the success of this project in each of its many facets. She has directed the editorial aspects of the publication with admirable clarity and masterful composure, keeping the many complex challenges of such a comprehensive project in her sights at all times. This book could never have been realized without her knowledge of the subject, her tireless dynamism, and her boundless energy. Her skillful coordination of the different sponsors involved in this ambitious undertaking is particularly noteworthy.

It goes without saying that the greatest debt of thanks is owed to the artist herself, Jutta Koether. Engagement with her work constantly opens up new vistas and avenues–each day brings a new intellectual departure and surprising adventure. She has granted us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in her conceptual cosmos, the boundaries of which we could hitherto only surmise. Without her trust, enthusiasm, and special feel for things, we would simply have been at sea. It was an inspiring experience, a privilege, and a great pleasure for us to embark on a tour through the history of art and culture from Jutta Koether's perspective. We warmly invite exhibition visitors and catalogue readers alike to accompany us on this tour.

Bernhard Maaz
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Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen

Achim Hochdörfer
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Sammlung Brandhorst

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Mudam Luxembourg
Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean

Tonio Kröner
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Museum Brandhorst

WET BOUNDARY:
THE EARLY WORK OF JUTTA KOETHER

Michael Sanchez

Jutta Koether, *Untitled*, 1989. Watercolor and ink on paper, 8¼ × 11⁹⁄₁₆ inches (20.9 × 29.4 cm)

A headless female body, in a 1984 painting by Jutta Koether, stands next to a grinning volcano. Lava drips out of the volcano's open top, and a stream of flowers flows out of the woman's neck.
17 If this painting, titled *As close as close as close…*,[1] is an allegory, as Koether's work tends to be, the volcano might be considered a figure for the generation of painters, generally categorized as "neo-expressionist," who erupted onto their canvases at the turn of the 1980s.[2] Standing next to this volcano, at a degree of remove from it, the female figure, a surrogate for Koether herself, sends flowers in its direction.[3]

But in what might appear at first to be a scene of production and reception, a problem arises: stopped at its entrance, the woman's flowers fail to find a receptacle in which to land. Since the volcano is a sender too, it cannot receive the flowers emitted into it. Rather than complementary operations, the two figures therefore perform the same one. From the wrong position—and, as we will see, with the wrong body—Koether, in the first half of the decade, gets "as close" as possible to these painter-volcanoes without ever taking their place.

Essential to Koether's work is the fact that she does not begin, in relation to the painting of the 1980s, from the position of a sender, but rather that of a receiver. For the frontispiece to her first catalogue, *Road to Cairo* (1985), Koether reproduced a drawing of a female figure whose eyes open avidly, even ecstatically, to rays of light from the sky.[4] The body of the figure in *Picasso* (1983), comparable to those in many of her early paintings, is covered in such eyes. Yet while the figures depicted in Koether's canvases can always receive, their ability to transmit tends to be restricted in various ways. In *Picasso*, for example, embers emerge from the top of the body's open head, advancing toward a second form on the opposite side of the canvas, only to be blocked by a rigid hat. Similarly, in *Love*
19 *is Life's combining art* (1983), a vase seems to overflow with flowers. But these, too, remain inside their container—the hard Art Deco angles of the vessel apply pressure to its contents, compounded by an aggregation of brushstrokes around its top.[5]

Writing as a critic for *Flash Art* under the pseudonym of Lucie Beyer, Koether, beginning in 1983, responded to a wide range of painting practices emerging in Germany. Approaching these diverse tendencies in a way that disregarded the customary distinctions between different groups (for instance, the Mülheimer Freiheit painters, or the artists who showed with Galerie Max Hetzler), she isolated certain recurrent motifs within the broader field of neo-expressionism in a way that both illuminates the key transformations of the historical moment and provides the conceptual groundwork for her own painting.

These critical texts can be divided roughly into two categories. On the one hand, Koether describes a dominant model that she would, in her own painting, react against. In her first review published in *Flash Art*, on the work of Martin Kippenberger, she emphasizes the artist's volcano-like productivity: "Kippenberger dives in headfirst," she writes in 1983, "true to his slogan: 'Think today—ready tomorrow.' His paintings are fast, and it is often possible to say the exact day on which they were painted."[6] Such extreme productivity is possible, Koether suggests, because he processes the works of others: "Kippenberger has no continuous style in fact he uses style the way other people use disposable cigarette lighters."[7] In a text titled "Polygamie" ("Polygamy," 1984), she describes the Mülheimer Freiheit painter Jiří Georg Dokoupil in similar terms, comparing him to a thousand-eyed Doctor Mabuse whose hungry eyes, recalling the ocellated body of her own *Picasso*, "polygamously" devour a range of historical and contemporary styles.[8]

Emphasizing the corporeality of this process, Koether's description is comparable to a number of contemporary texts that describe painting as "food": one of the earliest anthologies of the new painting to appear in the 1980s bore the title *Hunger nach Bildern* (*Hunger for Pictures,* 1982).[9] But painting, in this arrangement, not only occupies the position of input (that is, food) but of output as well. In a 1978 work by the Italian painter Sandro Chia, for example, a stream of piss flows from a walking figure, a proxy for the artist, into the painting, indicating the medium's status as a receptacle for bodily waste.

Koether elsewhere describes the same model, of painting-in and painting-out, in machinic rather than metabolic terms.[10] "Because new pictures are created every day and fed into the computer," she writes on the subject of paintings made by George Condo during a 1985 visit to Cologne, "it's ready to spit out new ones."[11] This coincides, Koether continues, with a physical motion on the part of the "computer": "Therefore the program contained the command 'go to Paris,' and the statistics on the surplus of oil paint and canvas showed the advisability of abandoning the artist's studio for a hotel room or any other kind of room, and of spreading paint thinly onto small canvases."[12] Fueled by painting inputs (that is, by "oil," in its double meaning as paint and energy source), an artist such as Condo, she suggests, generates a constant flow of painting outputs as he moves from place to place.

However, Koether was equally interested in other examples, perhaps more marginal, in which we find very different kinds of bodies: sick and malfunctioning as opposed to healthy and efficient. Alongside her Kippenberger text, she published a review of an exhibition by Peter Bömmels, her collaborator at the music journal *SPEX*, that consisted of paintings made with human hair. "The female figure is injured," writes Koether of one work, "she leans on a stick, her double breasts wounded. She is pregnant, vulnerable, imprisoned by ropes; she grows, she flies, she props herself on a needle … she is her own wound, one that opens again and again."[13] Extending this painting-body analogy, Koether, in a 1985 text on the painter Hans Peter Adamski, equates a sick body with a sick painting: "*Sick Child with Mucus* and *Self-Portrait as a Child with Measles*," she writes, "seem to be intended to convince the visitor, with their blemished, mashed-potato skin, that painting is no more valuable than a peeling scab."[14]

Due to the reflexive as well as expressive nature of painting in the 1980s, the bodily process performed by the painter

appears within the painting itself. One early proponent of neo-expressionism claims that content should move across the painting in the same way that the painter's body moves through space: The "image rolls like a ball," he writes, "along the picture surface."[15] Within these terms, a frictionless flow of paint across the canvas would be the formal equivalent of a fast metabolism. Situating herself within this iconographic convention, Koether, in a 1983 canvas titled *Part of some Totality*, depicts a triangle-shaped body mounted on two breast-like wheels. But instead of "rolling" across the painting, as we might expect, it does the opposite.[16] The space of Koether's paintings, as Diedrich Diederichsen noted in the first essay devoted to her work, is unusually "flat" and "dimensionless."[17] Pushed against the surface of the picture plane, the body-machine has nowhere to go.

In such "trapped paintings," as she called them, Koether often reapplies the same basic template: a single, central motif locked in place with tightly wrapped strokes of paint.[18] This central figure is either a body, a machine, or some combination of both: In *Bonehouse of Flesh Blood Heart and Remain* (1983), the "bonehouse of flesh" takes the form of a lantern, albeit one that is surrounded by a ring of brown paint that blocks any ray of light that might escape from it. Derived from her reception of postwar artists like Frank Auerbach, this thick crust reappears in several of Koether's works from 1983.[19] Its density, combined with the physically small formats of her canvases, contributes to the sensation that both the paintings and the figures within them are squeezed.

Against the dominant models of the 1980s, Koether's paintings, therefore, dramatize their own dysfunction. Given the intimate linkage between painting and the body in the neo-expressionist moment, this drama plays out on both the painterly and bodily levels. One way for a painting, or a painter, to be "sick" is for the metabolic process to be interrupted. Suggesting blockage on the output side, the body-machine in *Bonehouse of Flesh Blood Heart and Remain* appears to be trapped in its own waste, as is signified by the buildup of brown crust around it. The pressure generated by this blockage, however, gives her early paintings a crystalline quality that sets them apart from those of her contemporaries. And in contrast to Kippenberger's quick and casual manner, Koether's style is distinctly slow and overworked, the product of an "obsession," as she characterizes the drive of another outlier in the German painting of the time, Antonius Höckelmann.[20]

Why would Koether in particular experience such blockage? The answer lies in the ways in which the painting of the 1980s implicated the bodies of certain kinds of artists to the exclusion of others. The decisive factor was gender: the painter's body, as many critics noted at the time, was specifically male.[21] In "Facharbeiterficken" ("Specialized Worker Fuck," 1982), the artists Werner Büttner, Georg Herold, and Albert Oehlen self-consciously stage this fact.[22] Here, the bodily relationship of painter to painting is framed not so much as a metabolic process, but rather as "fucking."[23] To "fuck art," in their language, is to make "close contact with the material (money-generating material)," that is, the canvas.[24]

As a "specialized worker fuck," only "specialized workers" (painters) can perform this sexual act.[25] Mocking the limited purview of their own activity, they "work" in a niche market that is open only to men.[26] "There, where idleness [*Faulheit*] doesn't lead to art, are women," reads a passage in *Wahrheit ist Arbeit* (*Truth Is Work*), a 1984 catalogue by Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen. "They can't paint, because they chicken out of work (truth)."[27] If a body cannot perform the male sexual function, that body must be on the side of "idleness" (that is, nonwork). Testifying to the strength of this prohibition, the various dysfunctional bodies that Koether identifies in her early reviews, from the "sick" child to the "imprisoned" woman, all have one aspect in common: they are not sexually active adult men.

The exclusion of women from the domain of "work" extended to the outlets of distribution as well. In paintings by Oehlen and Kippenberger from the same time as Koether's first canvases, the gallery appears as a sexual receptacle analogous to the canvas. Recalling his earlier collaborative sculpture with Kippenberger, *Orgonkiste bei Nacht* (*Orgone Box by Night,* 1982), as well as a later series of paintings of houses titled "Loves Body" (1985), Oehlen's *Galerie Max Hetzler* (1983), for example, depicts his gallery as a box.[28] The purpose of Wilhelm Reich's orgone box was, of course, to increase sexual energy; the container in *Orgonkiste bei Nacht*, a cipher for the gallery space, is filled with paintings. Like the "contact" between painter and painting, the "contact" between the painting and the gallery, in this logic, constitutes another act of "love." Paralleling the corporeal process that produced the painting in the first place, the gallery "body" transforms this byproduct of the painter's body (whether sperm or waste) into money (painting is, after all, "money-generating material").[29] In a "specialized" (that is, closed) market, these conversions are arranged into a self-reinforcing loop. Since money flows back to the artist, physically sustaining his life, the movement of paintings keeps the painter moving.

In related works, Oehlen makes it clear that women specifically could not enter this closed system. In *Rock 'n' Roll Beerdigung* (*Rock 'n' Roll Burial*, 1985), a brick wall, comparable in construction to those of the gallery in *Galerie Max Hetzler,* blocks the cartoon figure of a woman who approaches it.[30] This brick wall is emblazoned with a metal plaque mounted onto the painting: the painting literally becomes the wall. Barred from entry into the medium and the distribution networks around it, a female artist like Koether painted from beyond this systemic boundary as a matter of necessity. On attempting to make "contact" with the canvas, she encountered physical resistance from the medium itself: her crust, for example, surrounds the support without penetrating it. One step removed from initiating the kinds of economic processes that would enable her to live from her painting, Koether's first canvases were neither produced in a studio nor, for the most part, distributed through galleries. Instead, she painted at her home in Cologne for an audience of

Jutta Koether, *Picasso*, 1983. Oil on canvas, 11¾ × 9½ inches (30 × 24 cm)

close friends. The formal and material compression of her early paintings is inseparable from the fact that they literally had no broader outlet.[31]

Yet her work attests to a constant struggle to push beyond this narrow frame. In the early 1980s she attempted the ill-fated task, suggests Diederichsen, of inserting "punk" content—which he identifies with the "expressive smears" (*Geschmiere*) of neo-expressionism—into the small formats and "folk" techniques of the apartment studio.[32] In *I want Freedom Lady* (1983), for example, whose title echoes the post-punk painters of the Mülheimer Freiheit, the neck of a female nude seems to extend, in an act of "freedom," beyond its top edge. Another nude from the same year, however, reveals the failure of this attempt: the hand that had apparently transcended the boundaries of the canvas returns within its frame as an inset image.

The same dynamic appears in Koether's first solo exhibition, whose title, *Road to Cairo*, is derived from a Julie Driscoll cover of a song by David Ackles. In Ackles's "Road to Cairo," a husband sings of returning home to his wife in Cairo after a long period of travel. Repeated by Driscoll, a female vocalist, the lyrics no longer make sense: for a woman to sing these lyrics is to recount a homecoming to a location that she has never left. Indeed, in her catalogue text Koether describes the "road to Cairo" as a road that does not extend beyond its starting point. The word *Cairo* at the conclusion of her tale refers not to the city in Egypt but to her own room, the location where her paintings began.[33]

In the rare instances when she did exhibit her early work, Koether confronted a similar paradox. Like the woman in the frontispiece to *Road to Cairo* (1985), or like the antenna peering out of the top of a breasted vessel in a 1983 painting, Koether looked into galleries from outside their walls. But on the cover of this same catalogue, the woman's face appears hidden under a veil that extends to her eyes. At the moment of their ostensible exposure to the public, therefore, Koether's paintings, along with the bodies within them, undergo a simultaneous restriction of visibility. In the same way that the receiver could not transmit, the observer could not be observed: her first solo exhibition does not appear to have elicited any critical attention.[34]

Coming up against Oehlen's wall, Koether suffered an effect that is perhaps best described as backfire. For a "lady" painter in Germany during the 1980s, to return to *I want Freedom Lady*, any act of "freedom" (that is, of expression) only led to further self-confinement.[35] Koether's early attempts at what might be called meta-neo-expressionism have a comically self-defeating aspect: to perform the same operation from a position outside the wall results in an effect contrary to the desired outcome.[36] This is clear if we compare *As close as close as close…* to another painting from 1984, *Instant of Instinct.* No longer sending flowers outward from her head, the female figure turns in on herself, stirring them in a vessel at her feet that resembles a mixing bowl. In the absence of external receptacles, she becomes her own receptacle. And in the absence of external observers, she becomes her own audience. Diederichsen's essay in *Road to Cairo* opens with an epigram from Montaigne on the subject of self-observation: "I study myself more than any given object."[37]

In response to the near-impossibility of distributing her paintings through galleries, Koether annexed another medium and another distribution system: magazines. This secondary system corresponded to Koether's situation inasmuch as its function was to observe: if she could not paint herself, then she could write about paintings by others. In addition to writing for *Flash Art*, she published texts on both art and music in the pop culture magazine *SPEX* under her own name. When she tried to use *SPEX* as an outlet for her own art, however, she confronted another impasse. Alongside the first text she published in the journal, an allegorical short story titled "Die Seele, der Tod und das Loch" ("The Soul, Death, and the Hole") that appeared in its January 1982 issue, Koether included a pencil drawing.[38] In it, a female figure drops a flower from under her skirt onto a book containing the image of a skull. The message is clear: the magazine (the book marked with an emblem of death) could not serve as a fertile ground for her art (the flower).

And although she did gain significant recognition for her writing during the 1980s, Koether faced certain limitations in this medium as well. The message on the plaque that Oehlen glued onto *Rock 'n' Roll Beerdigung*, "Killed by Death," is tautological: since this painting simply expresses the structure of the system that produced it, its meaning is self-sufficient.[39] To an outside observer, the painting communicates only its own closure, which is also a closure of communication itself: there is nothing to say beyond what the painting has already said. "Determination" (*Entschiedenheit*), write the authors of "Facharbeiterficken," in a passage quoted by Koether in a 1983 review, "must consist in leaving no room [*Freiraum*] for interpretation."[40] Thus, as a critic—someone who provides "interpretations" of paintings—Koether had "no room" to function outside of this hermeneutic circle.[41] If *Wahrheit ist Arbeit*, "truth" is on the side of "work": only producers can reflexively (and, indeed, self-mockingly) speak such a "truth," rendering any external interpretation "false."[42]

But for a woman to claim the position of painter was already, within the code of *Wahrheit ist Arbeit*, to make an indeterminate statement: a claim to "work" from a position coded as "idle," i.e., to do something from the outside that could only be done from the inside. To resolve this contradiction, she decided to "work" as a writer, not a painter, tying her professional identity, for the better part of a decade, to her writing rather than her painting. However, this solution generated a further contradiction. By "taking positions on both sides of the boundary," as Martin Prinzhorn put it, she split herself between two positions, painter and writer, which were considered mutually exclusive in Germany at the time.[43]

In her works around 1983, Koether had depicted isolated and static bodies that reflected the isolation and immobility of her own paintings. Several years later, however, as she began to contemplate a solution to the problem of incommunicability that had defined the first phase of her work, images of two bodies became the norm. Oriented toward each other, rather

Albert Oehlen, *Rock 'n' Roll Beerdigung*, 1985. Oil, gloss paint, plaque on canvas, 74 13/16 × 94 1/2 inches (190 × 240 cm)

than inward, these bodies begin to establish tentative physical "contact," frequently sexualized, with one another. In terms of technique, Koether attempted a similarly provisional "contact" with the painting itself. By the mid-1980s, her crust had given way to a more sensual style, reminiscent of Georgia O'Keeffe, in which paint is blended thinly into the weave of the canvas rather than superimposed in thick layers on it.

This turn coincided with a change in format: at either end of the oblong horizontal canvases in her "blues" paintings (1984–85), Koether places a body whose function is either to send or to
41 receive. In *Moderne Seele* (*Modern Soul*, 1985), for example, a cloud bursting with light (the sender) appears on the left opposite
43 a vaginal triangle (the receiver). Similarly, in *Nimm deine Flöten glücklicher Hirt, Dir wieder zu eigen* (*Take Your Flutes, Happy Shepherd, To Embrace Yourself Again*, 1985), the word "listen" appears on the left, linked by a curving line to mountains (recalling the volcano of *As close as close as close…*) on the right.
34 In *Hirtengesang I* (*Shepherd's Song I*, 1985), a small red body, labeled "DAS FEUER" (Fire), is the sender; the bar at the top, a slit for eyes that recalls the veiled woman on the cover of *Road to Cairo*, is the receiver.[44] The words "OH AAAH" in the middle of the canvas indicate a pleasurable communication between the two, although one that retains a certain awkwardness: the script is written in thin uppercase letters, at once intimate and distant.

Such communication, in formal terms, occurs across the expanse of the painting. A group of works from 1986, titled
23 "Economy Crisis / Schutzmaßnahme" (Economy Crisis / Protective Measure), retains the basic structure of the "blues" paintings, except that a third term appears in the space between the two poles. This rectangular surface, in Koether's rendering, is a figure for her own painting: it is a painting within the painting. But it is also unmistakably a body, with an eye and a vagina as
30 channels to connect the two bodies around it. In *Porte d'Orleans*, one of a 1985 group of paintings made during a stay in Paris that reflect her engagement with the work of Piero della Francesca, an eye appears wedged between the two heads like a "port" to fit them together. A rectangular vagina, in a nude from 1985 titled *Smell of Female* after the Cramps album, functions as a 4
window (another kind of "port") for a ray of light to pass through. As a painting embedded within the body, it duplicates a larger version of the same motif that extends from the woman's shoulder to the edge of the canvas, suggesting that the work itself might have a similar function.

After the mid-1980s, Koether conceived painting as a second body, whose purpose was to supplement, or even supplant, her own. Wrapped around her, as the curtain motifs in her 1987 exhibition of red paintings at Galerie Bleich-Rossi in Graz indicate, the function of Koether's painting was nevertheless the opposite of a veil: it facilitated communication rather than withdrew it.[45] Compensating for an inability to communicate directly, Koether began to use painting, therefore, as a prosthetic device. In an
ensemble work from 1986, *First Class Road*, she depicts the 51
various communicative functions that this interface was capable of performing on her behalf. The volcano on the lower left indicates that it is a sender. The small red paintings with holes, resembling those in Koether's "Principal Wireless Stations" [ill. p. 214], are identifiable as receivers. And a spine-like painting in the center of the assemblage relays the money-shaped units that enter its "wireless stations" to the artist herself, the brain that controls the entire ensemble.

As both sender and receiver, this new interface synthesizes the two bodies and two functions that previously had been split
across the poles of the "blues" paintings. In a 1986 painting, 49
Koether renders this interface as a tank, a motif that reappears in *f.*, an autofictional novella published on the occasion of the 1987 exhibition in Graz.[46] With its upturned front resembling the flat rectangular surface of the painting, Koether steers the vehicle constructed out of her own paintings from inside. Although clearly female, it incorporates certain functionalities that had previously been limited to the male body. Its penile guns are senders that pierce holes in the night sky, foreshadowing her 1988
paintings after Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1889). Yet 64, 65
these extensions, like the antennae that first appeared in her 1983 paintings of female vessels, are receivers too, in search of signals from this same sky. Designed for a sexual rather than a military application—that is, to reassemble the genders rather than to divide them, as the wall had done—this vehicle permits the person behind it (Koether) to communicate, back and forth, with the one in front of it.

"Ideal Contact": a woman's hand holds a calling card bearing this message in a 1989 watercolor by Koether. As she attempted to transform painting into such a calling card, the artist conceived "ideal contact" in terms of the professional or sexual relationships that the canvas might establish with other people.[47] The phrase refers with equal force, however, to Koether's "contact" with the medium itself. Since she could not make such "contact" on her own, she did so, as we will see, through these others. But so long as Koether staged "contact" within the frame of the
painting—with painted bodies—it would remain an act of *Mutige* 32

Jutta Koether, *Untitled*, 1992. Mixed media on paper, 12 × 8¾ inches (30.5 × 22.4 cm).
From artist's binder of drawings related to the installation *The Inside Job*, New York, 1992

Liebe, or "audacious love," to quote the title of a 1985 work. In the absence of a partner, Koether, in the "blues" paintings, "sings the blues." One work, *Thoughts of Light and Sex, Music and Painting, Regrets and Solution* (1985), acknowledges the truth of the series: while its left-hand corner is occupied by a stylized portrait of Koether with balls coming out of her mouth, there is no person on the other side. Koether's task at the turn of the 1990s, therefore, was to force the canvas, her own body, and the bodies of others into the functional positions that she had designated. To do this, painting would have to enter another stage, a stage of human interactions, on which it could be instrumentalized in a new way. "Here begins," writes Koether in 1987, "the beyond of the surface-things: the social, sculptures, networks."[48]

This break coincided with her move to New York, where she would spend increasing amounts of time in the subsequent decade. In a project titled *The Inside Job* (1992), executed shortly after her initial arrival, Koether invited guests to her new studio (which was, in fact, a small apartment, similar in scale to the rooms where she had worked in Cologne) to view and discuss a large painting in progress that she had laid on the floor.[49] In this "encounter situation," as she called it, the senders/receivers from the 1987 Bleich-Rossi red paintings materialize into real bodies: those of Koether and her guest. Engaged in a dialogue around the painting, their words are no longer painted on the canvas, as they had been in the "blues" paintings, but exchanged *in viva voce* above it.

Koether presented *The Inside Job* within the context of a multisite exhibition series called *The Real Thing*, organized by the artist Erik Oppenheim, whose premise was for visitors to make appointments with artists at their studios.[50] Oppenheim conceived *The Real Thing* as a structure that would encourage artists to become promoters of their work. The flyer for *The Real Thing*—whose participants included Karen Kilimnik, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Gavin Brown—describes the artists' studios as "galleries," a designation that Koether took up by hanging a sign reading Store Hours on the door to her room.[51] Rather than attempting to send her paintings out into a system of distribution that could not receive them, Koether, by issuing invitations for guests to come visit her, staged her own reception as an "inside job."[52]

Held in a place that functioned both as a studio and a place of display, *The Inside Job* is structured by an oscillation between what she calls two "one-on-One" encounters: the first with Koether and her guests, as "clients," and the second with the artist and the painting.[53] After Koether and her guest discussed the painting, she would return, alone, to the canvas: "I work my self (physically) in and out of the painting, all the time, forth and back."[54] By incorporating the guests' responses into her painting sessions, Koether generated the painting out of its own reception. "The painting is not finished yet," she writes in her first entry in the "meta-journal" that she kept throughout the project, "but part of the finishing process is the people who will come and show an interest in that doing."[55]

Installation view, *The Inside Job*, New York, 1992

The Inside Job, as the prototype for much of Koether's future work, has an inverse relationship to the dominant models of the previous decade. Against any "expressive" model that moves from the artist outward, affective responses flow from others into the painting, like an *Affective Import*, per the title of her first solo exhibition with Pat Hearn in 1993.[56] The kind of communication that she encourages is not closed—that is to say, "determined" in advance, as we see with Oehlen, Büttner, and Kippenberger—but open. While these artists, in their jointly authored texts, frequently employ the "we" to signal collective privacy, Koether uses language in the opposite manner. With titles like *You and Me like Money and Time*, as she called a 1985 painting, Koether directs communication outward (at "you") rather than inward (at "us").[57] Through a form of implication, she addresses her viewers and visitors in such a way as to generate what she calls "complicity" with them.[58]

Permuting the traditional structure of collaboration, *The Inside Job* is closed at the moment of production and open at the moment of reception. If artists of a given circle, like Oehlen and Kippenberger, tended to work exclusively with one another in the 1980s, Koether and her guests arrive at the painting not only from different groups but from different countries. Through it, she makes "contact" with people in New York, and people in New York make "contact" with her. Literalizing the function of the interface that had first emerged in the Bleich-Rossi exhibition, the painting in *The Inside Job* becomes a "passpicture," as she describes it.[59] While this "passpicture" connects one side to the other, it does so precisely by maintaining the difference between them. "Of course I am an alien person here," she writes. "So there is a difference already. I do not want or wish d [*sic*] to establish myself in New York as a New Yorker. No full assimilation to that American Way of being an artist."[60]

Koether's painting reflects, in imagery and form, its new status as "passpicture." At the center of the painting a body-shaped fissure recalling Jackson Pollock's *The Deep* (1953) opens into its negative space.[61] Around it, two red lines slant inward to indicate passage through this fissure. Naked figures on either side—"involved in some sexual activity," she writes—extend their limbs over it, embracing the boundary itself as they make contact with the other side.[62] Similar fissures open around the frame of the canvas, suggesting that it is not only the bodies depicted in the canvas but also the two real bodies within the room that pass through it.

For this reason, Koether no longer seals her paintings' surfaces as she had done in the 1980s. Instead of burying the canvas under a scab-like crust or polishing it with a smooth finish, her paintings now remain materially open, even raw. Splayed across the floor, the painting in *The Inside Job* is a *nasse Grenze*, or "wet boundary," per the title of a 1991 work, as opposed to a hard boundary like Oehlen's wall. Its paint not yet fully dried, it acquires a porous, almost adhesive quality: in *f.*, Koether compares her painting to a piece of velvet, a material, she writes, characterized by its absorptiveness.[63] Covered in "buttons," she continues, this surface is designed to be opened and closed, in a way that she compares to lips or a wound.[64] Painting thus functions in the manner of the pink tissue-paper pages of her 1989 artist's book, *20 Minuten: Aufzeichnung / Recording,* which, given their tendency to cling together, the reader must gently pull apart.[65]

Each session of *The Inside Job* began with Koether opening this body to her guests: to invite them into her room is to invite them into the painting. Describing the project as a "live-experiment," she performs an operation on the painting that she understands, quite literally, in surgical terms.[66] Koether, in 1988, replaced Lucie Beyer, the critic, with another alter ego, Mrs. Benway, the fictional wife of Dr. Benway, a recurrent character in the novels of William S. Burroughs.[67] On the stage of his surgical theater, Dr. Benway "operates," in Koether's words, "under the influence with dirty knives."[68] Mrs. Benway, writes Koether, stands "by his side," repeating these operations on another "patient," the painting.[69] In a recent interview, Koether has compared the interaction in *The Inside Job* to an appointment between a doctor and a patient—albeit one that is not simply "one-on-One," but, due to the painting's presence, triadic.[70]

After the guest enters the body of the painting, Koether closes it around them. When the project was complete, she published the "meta-journal" containing her descriptions of each encounter, along with the names of all the "partners, participants, con-boys and girls" who took part.[71] The cover of the book, published the following year in a small edition as *J.K.: The Inside Job*, is designed to replicate the appearance of the journal: the first page of the book is a photocopy of its cover. By printing this cover with her initials, J.K., she claims these participants as her own, absorbing their interactions into her work. To perform an "inside job" is, therefore, for Koether, to open her practice at one level in order to close it again at a higher one.

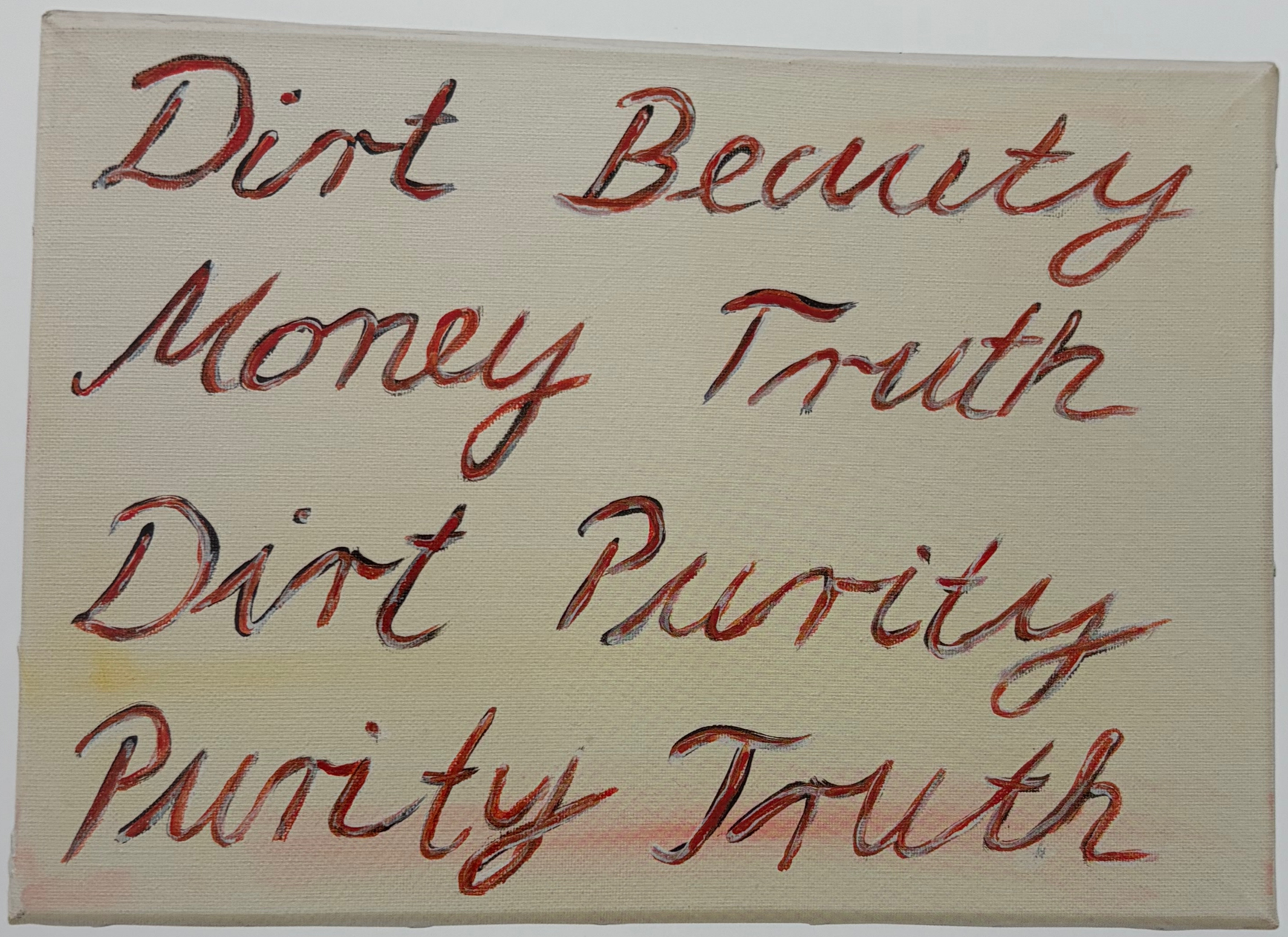
But there is yet a further dimension of opening and closing at work in *The Inside Job.* The underlying purpose of the entire project was for Koether to enter another social body: to "penetrate," in her words, the "social fabric" of New York.[72] Rather than a wall around an existing social world, painting became a door for the artist to enter another one. As a port of entry from Cologne to New York, the canvas enabled her to cross the oceanic (that is, "wet") boundary between the two continents. Through this crossover, facilitated by the "passpicture," Koether's guests (some of whom, like Hearn, would go on to show her work) transformed into the new hosts.[73]

While the artist and writer Pierre Klossowski has influenced a number of different aspects of Koether's work, his trilogy of novels titled *The Laws of Hospitality* is particularly important for *The Inside Job.*[74] Klossowski's story centers on a host, Octave, who invites different guests into his home for the purpose of offering his wife, Roberte, to them. In this "experimental" scenario, whose triadic structure recalls Koether's own, he watches to see what will transpire between his wife and the guest, recording the events in a journal published as part of Klossowski's book.[75] In the role of the husband—which is also, arguably, that of the promoter or dealer—Koether, in *The Inside Job,* offers the painting to her guest. To play this part, she puts on her version of Burroughs's "Banker's Drag," wearing a man's shirt and tie for her portrait in *J.K.: The Inside Job.*[76]

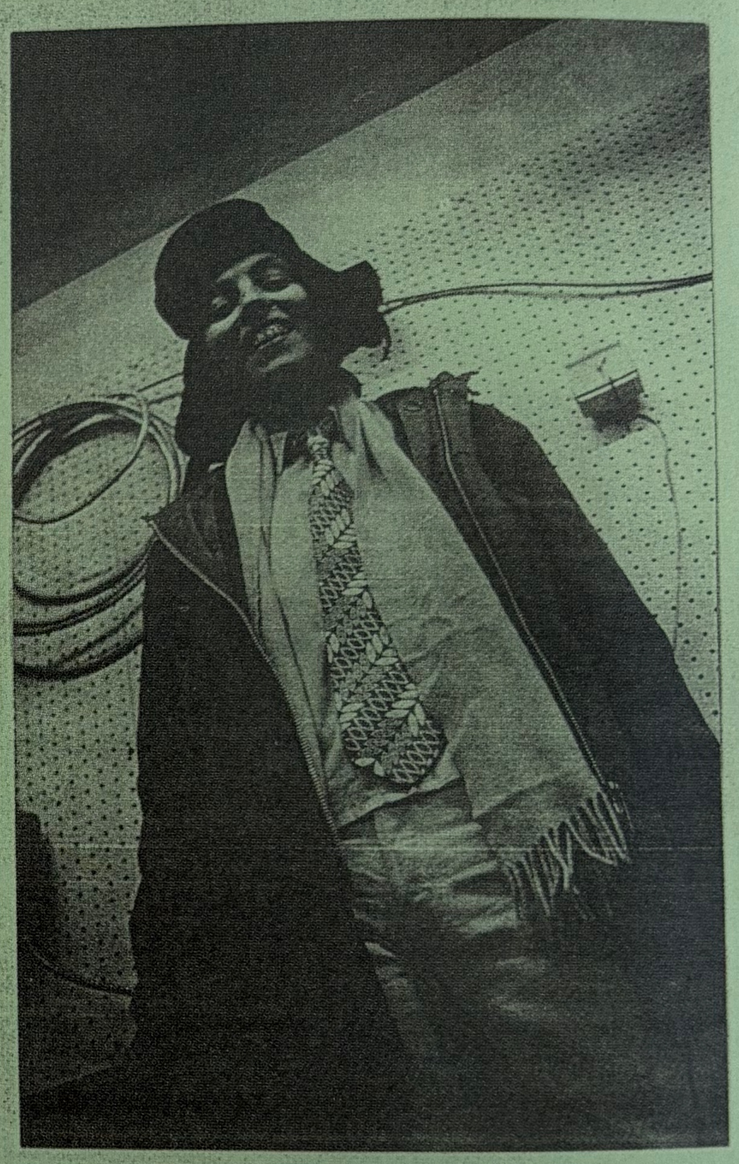
With Koether as the husband, the painting is in the role of the wife. For Octave, sexual contact with his wife is only possible at a distance, that is, through the body of the guest.[77] In a similarly indirect fashion, as opposed to simply "fucking art," Koether can only claim her medium by giving it to another.[78] Over the course of the scenario described in *The Laws of Hospitality*, Octave alternates between the positions of host and guest. Once the guest takes the place of the host, the host, as an observer, becomes a guest, in Klossowski's words, "in his own home."[79] *The Inside Job* is based on much the same principle of reciprocity: after Koether opens the painting to her guest, that guest opens it to her. Seeing it through another's eyes, she returns to the canvas as a guest in her own work.[80]

For Klossowski, the indeterminacy of Roberte's position gives her the power to reverse the opposing positions of those around her. This indeterminacy takes the form of a gender and moral dualism: she is a woman with masculine traits, an "inspectress of censorship" who nevertheless leads an uninhibited life.[81] Koether's paintings, beginning in the late 1980s, combine similarly opposed attributes. In a series of paintings that Koether showed in 1987 at La Máquina Española in Seville, the words "Dirt" and "Purity" alternate in a grid: their surfaces, she writes in *f.*, are "pure dirty pure dirty," i.e., neither pure nor dirty, but both at the same time.[82] As third terms, her paintings are, like Roberte, converters: Diederichsen, in his catalogue text for this exhibition, identifies the artist's main concern as "the total convertibility of the ideas and values used by art."[83]

Prefiguring this notion, Koether's *You and Me like Money and Time* depicts a hand and a foot from different bodies, rendered



Jutta Koether, *Untitled (from the series: Spectacle of the West Permanent Investment)*, 1987. Oil on canvas, 10 × 14 inches (25.5 × 35.5 cm)



THE INSIDE JOB

Was fuer ein Ding ist das ? the one One

FEAT. "ENJOYMENT AS A POLITICAL FACTOR"

Jutta Koether 212-473 4525 one-on-One
by appointment

Jutta Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job* (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1993), n.p.

in a style reminiscent of Klossowski's drawings, converging at the center.[84] Through such contact, Koether suggests, the painting converts "time" into "money," and "me" into "you." At the turn of the 1990s, painting thereby undergoes a fundamental transformation. If the body of the artist, in the context of neo-expressionism, functioned as a converter, paintings had been its inputs and outputs. Koether's work reverses this order: with painting as the converter, bodies become its inputs and outputs. No longer a mere receptacle for the artist, painting is activated as an entity in itself. Performing a differential operation on the humans around it, its purpose is not simply to facilitate exchange between people, but to use them as the very objects of exchange.

With painting on one side and writing on the other, or the world of art on one side and that of music on the other, Koether had occupied such an indeterminate position herself in the 1980s. "Being in the middle is good," she writes in 1987, "I'm happy that I'm in an organization that sticks me in the middle of itself."[85] Only within the framework of a higher-level "organization," coincident with *The Inside Job*, could she insert painting into this central place. The result is that painting no longer alternates with what Diederichsen calls a "second" form of production.[86] Moving back and forth between Germany and America since 1991, Koether, instead, "switches" herself (and others) between various roles in relation to her medium.[87] Always present, painting is both the catalyst for this crossover and the filter that defines the conditions of passage.

NOTES

1. All titles of works, and orthographies, are Koether's own. When a work is titled in German, a parenthetical translation is included.
2. For a perceptive early analysis of the "new German painting," see Johannes Gachnang, "New German Painting," *Flash Art*, February–March 1982, 33–46.
3. This position corresponds to her relationship to the Mülheimer Freiheit artists in the early 1980s, particularly Walter Dahn. In an interview with Diedrich Diederichsen, Koether remarks on her "proximity and the distance" from this group. This is expressed, as she and Diederichsen note, in a 1981 photograph of the artists in their studio, in which she can be seen reading a book in the background. Jutta Koether, untitled interview with Diedrich Diederichsen, in *koether: massen* (*koether: masses*), exh. cat. (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1991), n.p.
4. Jutta Koether, *Road to Cairo*, exh. cat. (Germany: Galerie Barbara Jandrig; Graz, Austria: Galerie CC, 1985), n.p.
5. In the work of Rosemarie Trockel, with whom Koether exhibited several times in the 1980s, the motif of the vessel can be considered a symbol of the receiver. In a 1982 painting titled *Versprechen einer unsichtbaren Rose* (*An Invisible Rose's Promise*), Trockel depicts two amphorae whose surfaces reflect a robot motif likely taken from a portrait of Dahn by Jiří Georg Dokoupil from the same year. See Wilfried Dickhoff, ed., *Rosemarie Trockel: Bilder—Skulpturen—Zeichnungen*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Rheinland-Verlag, 1985), 10–11.
6. Lucie Beyer, "Martin Kippenberger / Zwirner, Cologne," *Flash Art*, November 1983, 72.
7. Beyer, "Martin Kippenberger," 72.
8. Jutta Koether, "Polygamie," in *Dokoupil: Arbeiten/Travaux/Works, 1981–1984*, ed. Wilfried Dickhoff, exh. cat. (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1984), 140.
9. Gerd de Vries and Wolfgang Max Faust, *Hunger nach Bildern: Deutsche Malerei der Gegenwart* (*Hunger for Pictures: Contemporary German Painting*) (Cologne: DuMont, 1982). Koether compares the artist's studio to a "clean witch's kitchen of paintings." Koether, "Polygamie," 140. The metaphor of paintings as "food" might be complicated by the fact that the painters of the 1980s tended to appropriate precisely the paintings that had been filtered, like waste, out of the modernist canon.
10. Emphasizing the machinic dimension of an ostensibly neo-humanist return to painting, Oswald Wiener has described neo-expressionism (in dialectical terms) as "the answer of market forces to machines' need for symbols (in the manner of logos) of their own non-mechanicity" (*Nichtmaschinlichkeit*). Wiener, in "Zur Neuen deutschen Kunst: Positionen eines Gesprächs zwischen Oswald Wiener, Gufo Reale und Friedrich Heubach (On New German Art: Positions of a Conversation between Oswald Wiener, Gufo Reale and Friedrich Heubach)" in *Von hier aus: Zwei Monate neue deutsche Kunst in Düsseldorf* (*From here on: Two Months New German Art in Düsseldorf*), ed. Kasper Koenig, exh. cat. (Cologne: DuMont, 1984), 230.
11. Lucie Beyer, "George Condo," *Flash Art*, Summer 1985, 42.
12. Beyer, "George Condo," 42.
13. Lucie Beyer, "Peter Bömmels / Paul Maenz, Cologne," *Flash Art*, November 1983, 73.
14. Lucie Beyer, "Hans Peter Adamski / Städtisches Kunstmuseum, Bonn," *Flash Art*, March 1985, 52.
15. Achille Bonito Oliva, *Trans Avant Garde International* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1982), 90.
16. Oliva, *Trans Avant Garde International*, 90.
17. Diedrich Diederichsen, untitled text in Koether, *Road to Cairo*, n.p.
18. Jutta Koether, *f.*, trans. Nicholas Mauss and Michael Sanchez (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 35. This text was originally published in 1987.
19. Koether would have seen Auerbach's work at the 1981 Westkunst exhibition in Cologne, which was instrumental in the construction of an alternative genealogy for the return of painting in the 1980s. See Laszlo Glozer, *Westkunst. Zeitgenössische Kunst seit 1939* (*Westkunst. Contemporary Art since 1939*) (Cologne: DuMont, 1981), 438.
20. Beyer, "Martin Kippenberger," 72. Lucie Beyer, "Antonius Höckelmann / Zimmer, Düsseldorf," *Flash Art*, November 1983, 73. Koether also notes in the article that Höckelmann, in contrast to Kippenberger, is a "'classic' artist who works in solitude, independent of trends."
21. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October*, no. 16 (Spring 1981): 57.
22. Werner Büttner, Georg Herold, and Albert Oehlen, "Facharbeiterficken," in *Über sieben Brücken mußt Du gehen* (*Over Seven Bridges Must You Walk*) (Stuttgart: Max-Ulrich Hetzler, 1982), n.p.
23. Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen.
24. Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen.
25. Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen.
26. Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen.
27. n.n., "Wohnung," in Werner Büttner, Martin Kippenberger, and Albert Oehlen, eds., *Wahrheit ist Arbeit*, exh. cat. (Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1984), 29. The original German text reads: "Da, wo Faulheit nicht zur Kunst führt, sind Frauen. Sie können nicht malen, weil sie sich vor der Arbeit (Wahrheit) drücken."
28. See *Albert Oehlen*: *Farbenlehre* (Color Theory), exh. cat. (Hamburg: Galerie Ascan Crone, 1985), 17–19. Oehlen, along with Büttner, Herold, and Kippenberger, showed at Galerie Max Hetzler.
29. Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen.
30. See Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen, eds., 120. To give some other examples: in *Gemeinsam sind Frauen stark* (*Together Women Are Strong*, 1983), we see a lone woman's head behind a veil of leaves. In

Oehlen's series of self-portraits titled *Als Gott den Rock erschuf, muss er geil gewesen sein* (*When God Created the Skirt, He Must Have Been Horny*, 1984), a spiral separates Oehlen's head from the body of a woman floating in the space outside it.

31. If Condo used small formats because he painted in hotel rooms, Koether suggests her own miniature canvases emerged out of precisely the opposite conditions. Beyer, "George Condo," 42.
32. Diederichsen in *massen*, n.p.
33. Jutta Koether, "Cairo," in *Road to Cairo*, n.p.
34. On Koether's desire to be an "observed observer," see Diederichsen in *massen*, n.p.
35. It is characteristic of the 1980s that the ability to exercise such "freedom" was perversely limited to those inside the wall.
36. On the notion of "'second order' procedures" in Koether's work, see Jutta Koether, "Painting Abuse: A Conversation between Isabelle Graw and Jutta Koether," in *Jutta Koether: The Thirst*, ed. Daniel Birnbaum, exh. cat. (Stockholm: Moderna Museet; London: Koenig Books, 2011), 33.
37. The quote is reproduced in German: "Ich studiere mich mehr als irgendeinen Gegenstand." Diederichsen, in *Road to Cairo*, n.p.
38. Koether, "Die Seele, der Tod und das Loch—Eine Kurzgeschichte" ("The Soul, Death and the Hole—A Short Story"), 11.
39. See Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz Jr. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 143. "Killed by Death" refers to the title of a 1984 song by Motörhead.
40. Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen, in Jutta Koether, "Schlimme Zeiten sind immer zu lang: Werner Büttner und Albert Oehlen" ("Bad Times Are Always Too Long: Werner Büttner and Albert Oehlen"), *SPEX*, November 1983, 29, reprinted in Koether, *Kairos: Texte zu Kunst und Musik* (Berlin and Amsterdam: Edition ID-Archiv, 1996), 14.
41. Büttner, Herold, and Oehlen, in Koether, "Schlimme Zeiten," 14.
42. Büttner, Kippenberger, and Oehlen, eds., 29. In Koether's review, this "confusion" is the result of a perverse "educational program" (*Erziehungsprogramm*) whose premise is to send contradictory signals (her example, quoting the title of a 1982 book by Büttner and Oehlen, is "Blink right, turn left"). The receiver, as a result, is confronted with a double bind. Koether, "Schlimme Zeiten," 12, 14.
43. Martin Prinzhorn, "Transgressing the Rules for Transgression," in *Jutta Koether*, exh. cat. (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2006), 41–42. Diedrich Diederichsen, "The Meeting of the Present with the Absent Artist," in *Jutta Koether*, 80. Jutta Koether, in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "More Naked Than Naked: A Conversation with Jutta Koether," *October*, no. 157 (Summer 2016); 23. In *f.*, Koether reflects on this proliferation of incommensurate activities and identities: the painter she calls Herma, a "strict woman in a strict form," alternates with Lucie Beyer, the critic, whose profession necessitates the opposite attitude. Koether, *f.*, 30.
44. This is one of the few paintings in the "blues" series that is not in an oblong horizontal format.
45. Jutta Koether, *The things art makes – The poetry of economic analysis when translated into a foreign language – or, we never really understood a pop song*, Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Graz, October 11–November 17, 1987.
46. Jutta Koether, *f.* (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1987). The design of Koether's book is modeled on Andy Warhol's *a: a novel* (New York: Grove Press, 1968). Its title likely refers to the Orson Welles film *F for Fake* (1973).
47. In this essay, I implicitly historicize the notion of "transitive" painting that Joselit, following the work of Bruno Latour, has formulated in relation to Koether's work. See David Joselit, "Painting In and Out," in Daniel Birnbaum *Jutta Koether: The Thirst*, 22. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 238.
48. Koether, *f.*, trans. Mauss and Sanchez, 24.
49. Jutta Koether, "Intro to the Inside Job," in *J.K.: The Inside Job* (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1993), n.p. Regarding the project's title, which echoes William S. Burroughs's *The Job*, Koether has remarked: "The Inside Job, has a double meaning here, for one it is a crime (inside a corporation or a structure, like the S& L scandal was a huge American Socoety [*sic*] Inside Job) but ont he [*sic*] other hand it is referring to the situation of the artist inside a studio, a sort of hermetic space, even when he or she tries to open up, to appeal to the masses and so on." Koether, "New York, 9. April 1992," in *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p. I am maintaining the artist's orthography.
50. Koether, "New York, 9.April 1992," n.p.
51. Erik Oppenheim, promotional flyer for *The Real Thing* (April 4–May 3, 1992), reproduced in Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.
52. Koether in Buchloh, "More Naked Than Naked," 20.
53. Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.
54. Koether, "New York, 9.April 1992," n.p. Koether, "Intro to the Inside Job," n.p.
55. Jutta Koether, "4th and 5th of April 1992," in *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.
56. *Jutta Koether: Affective Import: Antibodies I–V*, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, May 27–June 26, 1993.
57. This title is derived from the Velvet Underground's song "Pale Blue Eyes" (1969). The original lyrics are: "Money is like us in time."
58. Jutta Koether, "New York, May 1992," in *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.
59. Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.
60. Koether, "4th and 5th of April 1992," n.p.
61. In the introduction to *The Inside Job*, Koether cites Pollock as an antecedent, specifically T. J. Clark's writing on his work. Koether, "Intro to the Inside Job," n.p.
62. Jutta Koether, "6th of April 1992," in *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.
63. Koether, *f.*, 23. Joselit makes a related point about the "sticky" texture of Koether's surfaces (Joselit, 23).
64. Koether, *f.*, 23.
65. Jutta Koether, *20 Minuten: Aufzeichnung / Recording* (Cologne: Galerie Monika Sprüth, 1989).
66. Koether, "Intro to the Inside Job," n.p.
67. Koether, *f.*, 20. William S. Burroughs, "Benway," in *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 21–45.
68. Koether, *f.*, 21.
69. Koether, *f.*, 22.
70. Buchloh, "More Naked Than Naked," 20. In her book, Koether includes a found note that reads: "Hi Dierdre, Thanx for calling … we have had every illness this winter … the pediatrician office our second home … other than that every ok? How's Ariana? How's painting going? Beth + Emma." Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.
71. Koether, "Intro to the Inside Job," n.p.
72. Kim Gordon, "Jutta Koether: The Inside Job," *Flash Art*, January–February 2011, 85.
73. Jutta Koether, "13.April 92," in *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.
74. Koether cites Klossowski at several points in *J.K.: The Inside Job*. See, for example, "New York, 9.April 1992," n.p.
75. Pierre Klossowski, *Les lois de l'hospitalité* (*The Laws of Hospitality*) (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 14.
76. Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p. This portrait is a photograph by Jan Avgikos. Koether mentions her interest in such "perverse" forms of dress in the interview with Diederichsen, in *massen*, n.p.
77. Klossowski, 110.
78. Diederichsen makes a similar argument about the oscillation between individual and collective production in Koether's work. Diederichsen, "The Meeting of the Present with the Absent Artist," in *Jutta Koether*, 80.
79. Klossowski, 133.
80. See Pierre Klossowski, "Retour à Hermès Trismégiste (de la collaboration des démons dans l'oeuvre d'art)" ("Return to Hermes Trismegistus [On the Collaboration of Demons in the Work of Art]"), in *La Ressemblance* (Marseille: Editions Ryoan-ji, 1984), 95–97.
81. Klossowski, *Les lois de l'hospitalité*, 66.

82. Koether, *f.*, 29. See also Jutta Koether, "Schmutz und Reinheit" ("Dirt and Purity"), *SPEX*, April 1987, 58–59. Along these lines, Martin Prinzhorn has described Koether's work as "acquiring a position of pure/impure painting" (Prinzhorn, ed., *Die Neunziger / The Nineties: Karen Kilimnik, Jutta Koether, Marlene McCarty,* exh. cat. [Ostfildern: Cantz, 1994], 39).
83. Diedrich Diederichsen, "Three, Three by Three," in *Koether/Semmer/Trockel,* exh. cat. (Seville: La Máquina Española, 1987), 26.
84. Anne de Villepoix, ed., *Trockel, Semmer, Koether*, exh. cat. (Rouen: La Grande Serre, 1985), n.p. In this catalogue, Koether published a short story titled "Smell of Female" that centers on an act of conversion.
85. Koether, *f.*, 47.
86. Diederichsen, "The Meeting of the Present with the Absent Artist," in *Jutta Koether*, 80.
87. Koether, *20 Minuten*, n.p.

O COLOGNE!

Anne M. Wagner

Jutta Koether, *Unvollendete Sympathie*, 2002. Acrylic on canvas, 86⅔ × 78¾ inches (220 × 200 cm)

Make Your Own Life

Cologne in the 1980s, Jutta Koether once remarked, was the "sort of place where people met."[1] Born and raised in the city, she was in a position to know. Her Cologne was a "culturally active environment": a place able to sustain both extroverts (Martin Kippenberger) and introverts (Rosemarie Trockel) alike. Koether was then in close touch with both artists, while also using her role on the editorial staff of *SPEX* magazine to engage with punk and its antecedents in the twentieth-century avant-garde: Meret Oppenheim and the Pet Shop Boys; Kim Gordon, the Melvins, and Vincent van Gogh.[2] But more than this, as she recalled in a brief 2006 text about the state of things then, the city provided "a very specific climate, that had already produced and had been favorable to these kinds of personas, to these fictional or semi-fictional identities, to people who just showed up and tried to do something, and to other people who just laugh about it, or find it relevant."[3]

From our current vantage point, Koether's account doesn't merely offer a personal reading of Cologne's artistic atmosphere. On the contrary, she provides a characterization as "specific" as the milieu it describes. The form is declarative, and its context—her words were printed in the catalogue of a touring exhibition launched in Philadelphia in 2006, pointedly titled *Make Your Own Life*—intended to establish a paradigm. The goal of the show, according to Bennett Simpson, the exhibition's curator, was to present Cologne as nothing less than a test case for the examination of "problems of artistic identification."[4]

If it is worth asking why Simpson took Cologne as such a useful illustration, the answer isn't to be found in his no-holds-barred picture of the city's art world as "one of the most contested, self-conscious, exaggerated, idealized, and loathed hothouses in contemporary art,"[5] a place noted for its factions, fan clubs, and fistfights. Nor is there a question of simply dismissing all this as youthful bad behavior. At the heart of Simpson's view is the idea of Cologne as a paradigm of "negative social value": hence its ability to provide the setting for an elaborate theater of self.[6] "To speak of Cologne," he argued, "is to speak of performance, not just artists performing their artworks, though of course this happened, but artists performing themselves within the social networks and communities of their peers."[7]

"Artists performing themselves": this still-striking formulation is at the center of Simpson's essay. If it is easy to accept that people have selves, the idea that we "perform" them—or ought to perform them—may be harder to digest. Why should artists assign themselves roles; why play at possessing a self? Do such elective identities have a place in some larger plot? Or does Simpson single out Cologne because it was a place where the very idea of self and selfhood had become oddly artificial, and thus exemplary? If so, then it would follow that artists in and around the German city should be understood as using their work to put this notion to the test. Their shared question, in other words, was how legitimate it is to believe that an individual can lay claim to the "essential being," the individuality, that defines and distinguishes one's sense of self. I give nothing away if I say at the outset that two answers prevail: "absolutely" and "not at all."

By now, no one needs reminding that to speak of identity and artifice is to conjure a distinctive phase within the philosophies of identity and self. If the intellectual roots of such views lie in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault, by 2006, the year Simpson mounted his exhibition, discussions of identity performance were strikingly widespread.[8] As so often happens, the process of dissemination brought further revision and refinement, including the reinterpretation of phenomena as distinct as Renaissance selfhood and the acquisition of sexed and gendered identity, now revitalized by thinkers as different as Stephen Greenblatt and Judith Butler.[9] Yet despite their differences, both Butler and Greenblatt nonetheless concur in the idea that self-identity is neither freely chosen nor an autonomous social artifact.[10]

In fact, it is fair to say that the gulf between Butler and Greenblatt—the former steeped in the European philosophical tradition from Hegel to Sartre, the latter a scholar of Elizabethan literature with existentialist commitments—only underscores the extent to which in the 1980s notions of self and identity had been thoroughly transformed, as Simpson perceived. The old identities—i.e., *woman*, *man*, *painter*, *artist*—seemed to have been emptied, leaving behind them only the rigid outlines of characters and roles. How does one choose who and what one is? And are such choices sufficient to the making of a life?

For at least some artists, real uncertainty was the result. As Koether was to put it in a conversation recorded some twenty years later, "You have to keep the question to which ends you invent your own construction open. It's not like there are so many going on but it's about where do you want to go, what is the part you're playing, how you go about that."[11] For Koether, it seems, there are few public roles or identities in which it is unnecessary to protect one's inner self.

To consider Cologne in the 1980s is to return to a time when such questions seemed urgent, at least in the art world—urgent enough to be the subject of art. The city, in other words, provided a quite specialized environment, a sort of psychic forcing house, which fostered self-inventions both exotic and mundane. In the eyes of its denizens, it was possessed of a "specific" ambience, an ethos or climate that, if not necessarily unique, somehow still succeeded in fostering the widespread improvisation, even invention, of alternative selves. Such "fictional or semi-fictional" identities were there for the taking, no matter how deep an individual's commitment to social and personal change.[12]

For some, shallowness wasn't a viable choice. In Koether's eyes, the fundamental question was what might be made to happen in her native city, despite her view of it as "ambitionless … sloppy, visionless and lazy."[13] Yet for all its faults—or rather, because of them—the city offered a context (quoting Koether once more) that managed to give "people who don't fit a permission [*sic*] to continue."[14] "Install criteria," Kippenberger

Hans-Jörg Mayer, *Untitled*, 1991. Gelatin silver print, 38 3/16 x 55 1/8 inches (97 x 140 cm)

commanded.[15] In fact, Cologne's permissive provincialism, its ill-assorted inhabitants, kept on raising what Koether referred to as the urgent question of *Liebensform*—by which, with a nod to Kippenberger, she meant "the way you conduct your life, how you wake up and what you discuss in the morning … every aspect is lived as a piece of what you do and what your art is about."[16]

In other words, it was the very shapelessness of life in the city that served as its structuring principle. Shapelessness meant choice. And Koether counted herself among those to whom Cologne presented such seemingly new and unexpected possibilities. She was quick to respond. Which is to say that along with a small group of other women, she understood Cologne as a context in which *female* ambitions—which is to say their own ambitions—could thrive.

In retrospect, there were objective reasons for this hope. One was generational. Born in 1958, Koether was able to profit from the work of older artists—particularly women—without feeling moved to place herself on a parallel track. Her initial commitments led her toward writing and rock—particularly punk. Yet by 1991 she had turned toward painting wholeheartedly enough to title a solo exhibition *100% Malerei*.[17] And this was not the only expectation she eluded as time went on. Years later, during an interview with Koether in 2016, which saw the art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh raising the question of performance art in Germany—not least as exemplified in the work of the feminist artist Ulrike Rosenbach, who not only lived and worked in Cologne in the 1970s, but also founded the School of Creative Feminism there in 1976[18]—Koether emphatically asserted her freedom to (here comes the fatal phrase once again) "make her own life."[19] Consider her reply to Buchloh's question, which saw her countering with a question of her own: "I kept asking, Why must feminist art practice perform 'otherness' in an 'other' medium? Why not in painting?" To this response the art historian had no reply. Koether, for her part, remains a painter today. At the same time, her performative commitment to "otherness" has helped to provide a vehicle for productive refusal—what in talking with Buchloh she termed the "potentials of misunderstanding."[20]

What is the part you're playing?

In all of this, "performance" remains a keyword. Koether's painting is supremely self-conscious. Over the years, she has made use of sunshiny yellows and menstrual reds; produced Klee-type checkerboards and happy faces (which, improbably enough, are full of feeling); and, perhaps most strikingly, devised a mode of drawing "bad" enough to be the work of a highly practiced artist, as Koether certainly is. She has also studiously evolved a means of denaturalizing, even "denaturing," the self—despite again and again presenting performances that radiated a "distinctive attitude and humour … a certain critical and celebratory spirit of feeling blessed with being bad at what you think you do best."[21] Which is to say that the practice of painting, like the possession of a self, is full of contradictions. Both involve relying on the limits of one's skills—limits, rather than strengths. This may be because such constraints are the only aspect of selfhood that can be taken as innate. Hence Koether's penetrating question: "What is this part you are playing?"

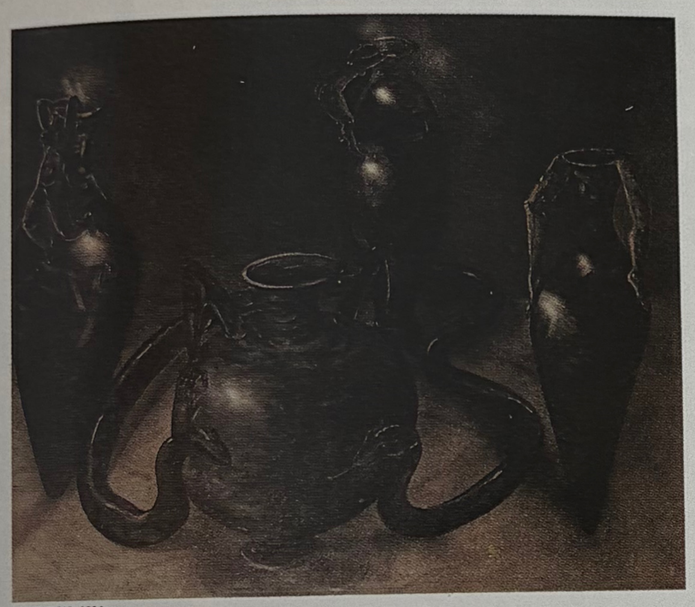
Let us imagine a conversation with Koether in which we ask her to answer this question herself. As a thought experiment, the idea makes a certain kind of sense, if only because Koether was so careful, as she put it, "'to keep the question to what ends you invent your own construction open."[22] To what extent was the idea of artistic identity really open for masquerade and play? When does that openness close? Fairly promptly, apparently, at least on the evidence we have. Consider one early document, a photograph taken by Hans-Jörg Mayer in 1991, which poses five friends from Cologne, Koether included, in the guise of Guatemalan guerrillas, rifles and all. It is hard to imagine any group of soldiers looking less professional, or more unwilling to serve. Behind the camera was Mayer, mastermind and éminence grise; the shoot was his brainchild, which means that he was the one to bring the photo he wanted reenacted, along with a small arsenal of guns.[23] As for his female models, why they chose to participate is anyone's guess.[24] Perhaps they suspected that Mayer hoped they might look cute.

When Koether herself resorted to an alter ego, her choice fell on a fictional character, Mrs. Benway. Or better stated, a doubly fictional character, the imaginary wife of vile Dr. Benway, the "Total Demoralizator," manipulator and coordinator of systems of symbols, as well as the resident sadist in William S. Burroughs's episodic masterpiece *Naked Lunch* (1959). Which leads to the question: who among us would wish to imagine ourselves as that doctor's helpmeet and bride? How might we categorize the wife of a sadist? As a masochist, perhaps? Or should we see Mrs. Benway through a different lens? To my mind, we cannot help but do so if we are to take seriously Koether's commitment to a performative practice in which the performer is able to exercise the privilege of constructing herself. To cite the artist once again: "Where do you want to go, what is the part you are playing, how do you go about that?"[25]

INTERVIEW WITH

ROSEMARIE TROCKEL

JUTTA KOETHER



MOSCHUS, 1984.
OIL AND SPRAY ON CANVAS, 70 x 200 CMS. COURTESY MONIKA SPRÜTH, KÖLN.

Jutta Koether: *We have reached a pluralistic phase of art, where everything is allowed. Countless currents and trends exist side by side. Should an artist not even more urgently set out the formal boundaries for his work?*

Rosemarie Trockel: It isn't important to set out limits for yourself. What is more important is to make clear the ideas you are dealing with. I work within an integrated structure. Now and then I produce pictures, sculptures and objects, and I consider it important (in order to make my position clear) always to return to the main lines I very often depart from. I don't believe that an artist should give explanations, we mustn't understand art that way. However, things must be set within a totality which doesn't leave any doubts about their direction. Frankness does not imply interchangeability.

JK: *What demands do you make on your work?*

RT: That I don't get lost in frivolity, and that my assertions—every stroke is one—should be understood.

JK: *Do you consider an attitude of opposition to be a component of art?*

RT: Of course. But facing every artist is the paradoxical task of achieving beauty without gloss.

JK: *What is the relation between you and the "models" of modern art as far us the question of artistic conduct is concerned. I refer, for instance, to Duchamp's* Negation of Art as Life-Work *or, at the opposite pole to Joseph Beuys's* Enlargement of the Conception of Art in Social Sculpture.

RT: Unfortunately, there are too many cases that have shown that the historical models were only used and consumed to bolster the theories of younger artists. For me and in my position as a woman it is more difficult, as women, have historically, always been left out. And that's why I'm interested not only in the history of the victor, but also in that of the weaker party. The masks, for example, consist not only of what they say or intend to say, but also of what they exclude. They have absence as their subject.

UNTITLED, 1986.
WOOD, DISPERSION, 129 x 100 x 15 CMS. PHOTO ULI GROHS, KÖLN.

THE ROSE OF KASANLAK, 1986.
PHOTOGRAPH.

JK: *Do you keep up-to-date on developments in art?*

RT: I keep my eyes open, of course, and I trust them more than the words of the critics and writers in art magazines.

JK: *Despite, or perhaps precisely for, their anti-individual technique, these pictures are, at the moment, arousing emotions (you use the swastika between Norwegian knitting patterns, the hammer and sickle, etc.) as well as stirring up questions. Was this your intention and, if not, what is your present position towards this double "boom"?*

RT: This is certainly not only a question of anti-individual technique. The patterns I use are, in principle, ones I come upon in knitting books, papers' like *Brigitte*, and designs for tapestries, fabrics, etc. In fact, the meaning of the concept "pattern" is the model to be copied. These knitted pictures, then, differ from conventional iconography. If I knit in a garment or sweater the hammer and sickle, for instance, there is a depreciation of the ideology bound up in identifying the logos for product propaganda and ideological propaganda. We must understand fashion not only as an adornment of the body, but as acting for the body of society. The business of the "boom" is surely connected with the fact that people see a nearness to the "Neo-Geos". In my work, the wave-designs of Op-art (Bridget Riley certainly has had a great influence on Op-art fashion) do not only have this art-historical connection. The serial patterns, just as the social conditions in which they originated, are of interest here, rather than the formalism of the right angle.

JK: *Did a definition precede the qualifying of the symbols? Symbols like the wool trademark and the Playboy Bunny are of course clear, but with political symbols like the swastika and hammer and sickle it becomes a more difficult.*

RT: It is wrong to qualify, but right to depreciate. The aesthetic attitude in these knitted pictures is one of depreciation, and indeed the depreciation relates not only to the material, but also to the symbols.

JK: *You work with what is "taboo" (knitwear/design). But, in the meantime, even this has become an element of artistic work among other artists (Armleder, Grünfeld).*

RT: At this point I should like to make a distinction. The aesthetics of the fifties, nowadays the object of ironic treatment by many artists, don't really interest me. But if something is fundamentally "taboo" that isn't only a question of taste. Materials, procedures and motives are meaningful aspects of the female and are, accordingly, looked upon as inferior and taboo.

JK: *What value do works of art hold for you?*

RT: Art works are focuses of time. They provide information about the relation between art, culture and the state. And the question of the meaning of art is bound up with this. But works of art only achieve this through their being objects of desire, through their beauty.

JK: *You were asked to contribute to the column exhibition at Jule Kewenig's. You hung three brooms from the ceiling and, therefore, as well as presenting a work of art as a souvenir and/or ready-made you disappointed the expectations of the workshop.*

RT: As for disappointment it was certainly a good side-effect. As far as the work itself is concerned a broomstick has, in my opinion, absolutely the same supporting function as a column. It plays a supporting role—one which today should no longer be tolerated.

JK: *You're using an increasingly varied number of techniques: Drawing came first and even restricted painting. What decisive impulse caused you to give these up or, more exactly, to pursue them only occasionally (wall painting, perfume-pictures). The aim was to provide yourself with as big a radius of action as possible. It was to maintain the tension between concrete statements, between committing oneself (in concrete figurative drawings, in definite objects like vases, and in the very concrete*

Jutta Koether, "Interview with Rosemarie Trockel," trans. John Lundon, *Flash Art*, May 1987, 40–42.

Koether went about her role as Mrs. Benway by channeling her voice—which is to say, by writing. Not only did her *SPEX* columns proliferate—these were signed by her alter ego—but she also began to work with Monika Sprüth on her gallery's publications (on which more later), and in 1987 brought out a novella, *f.* First published in German, and translated into English nearly thirty years later, its multiple sections—some titled, some not—adopt various voices, including that of dear old Mrs. B. It is Mrs. Benway who claims authorship of *f.*'s second section, "Things That Are Stuff—Found and Collected by Mrs. Benway." Among those "things" are a coral necklace, a velvet curtain, an orange ("very round, very lazy"), buttons, money, and more. But nothing Koether's character acquired was more consequential than lipstick. She used it once, and hey, presto!—"on this day Mrs. Benway was born, even more emphatically than on the day when she wrote in her handwriting in ink for the first time."[26]

As an allegory of conception, the birth of Mrs. Benway could hardly be more resonant. As Koether's own creation—her invention—she carried even greater weight. It is as if the artist is becoming an author as her readers look on. Moreover, this sort of making—or better, self-making—seems to have pervaded every aspect of her work. Remember that, while inventing Mrs. Benway, Koether was also inventing herself. The context was an art world—and a larger world—in which women were not merely playing increasingly significant roles, but were also at pains to make that new presence known. Take as evidence the landmark publication, in November 1985, of the audaciously clever magazine *Eau de Cologne*. The gallerist Monika Sprüth was the force behind it, with the artists in her gallery—no one more than Trockel—playing a role. Koether took part too, with a column once again written in the voice of Mrs. Benway, who speaks in the accent of apocalypse to invoke fire, shadow, and rock.

From the beginning, *Eau de Cologne* was intrepidly citational, so much so as to have lifted the look and feel of *Interview* magazine without batting an eyelid. Into its framework Sprüth slotted women—artists, singers, writers, curators, and gallerists—all of whom she considered exemplary. Two years later a second issue followed a parallel path. Then, in 1989, the third and final issue appeared, this time edited by Sprüth, Koether, and Karen Marta, her American collaborator. The result is transformed. *Eau de Cologne 3* exudes a newly formulated belief in the feminine as gendered performance. This is not to say that its pages fail to represent the work of women, but in 1989 they also included the contributions of (a very few) men. This was possible because, as its "Forward" [*sic*] declares, *Eau de Cologne 3* has changed its notion of women and men, adopting the view of Eva Meyer, here identified as "the German linguist / philosopher." Now, thanks to a new commitment to "thinking of the Female as a specific method of production, and no longer as only a special distinguishing mark of the woman.... It [is] possible to use the Female as a main characteristic in a system of meanings: **The Semiotics of the Female**."[27] Clearly this phrase had its appeal in 1980s Cologne, where the positions of French feminists were

Front and back cover of Jutta Koether's *f.* (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1987)

still relatively new. So, evidently, were the ironies of a slightly earlier generation of American feminists. In 1975, to give just one example, Martha Rosler made *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, the video performance that presents her triumphantly definitive deconstruction of the housewife's role—triumphant not least because it brings a materialist specificity to potentially noxious musings about "the female" and her role.

Producing One's Self as Other—Along with Everyone Else

In 1987, Koether conducted an interview with Trockel, her friend and fellow artist—one of a handful that the latter has agreed to. Its transcript, which appeared in English in *Flash Art* (its German original remains unpublished), shows the normally reticent Trockel repeatedly insisting on the aims and purposes that orient her work.[28] In fact, reading the exchange today, it is hard not to be struck by just how purposefully the two women are working together toward the mutual goal of getting their message across.

Point by point, Koether invites Trockel to outline her views. First, "JK" speaks: "We have reached a pluralistic phase of art, where everything is allowed. Countless currents and trends exist side by side. Should an artist not more urgently set out the formal boundaries for his work?" Then "RT," with an answer that shows just how ready she was for exactly this question—ready to make clear precisely which boundaries, formal or conceptual, *do* matter, and which do not:

> It isn't important to set out limits for yourself. What is more important is to make clear the ideas you are dealing with. I work within an integrated structure. Now and then I produce pictures, sculptures and objects and I consider it important (in order to make my position clear) always to return to the main lines I very often depart from. I don't believe an artist should give explanations, we mustn't

understand art that way. However, things must be set within a totality which doesn't leave any doubts about their direction.

In 1987, both Trockel and Koether were actively considering the "totalities" that most concerned them, among them feminism, fashion, identity, and the direction of their art. In Koether's case, this meant mixing various materials, among them feminism, painting, performance, and popular music. It also meant leaving Cologne—and Germany—behind. Otherness called. In 1991, she moved to New York City, and by 1994 she had begun to publish in English, using language in a whole new way. The transformation makes me think of the great British historian of the French Revolution Richard Cobb (1917–1996), who inevitably spent much time in France. There, as he told it, he developed a "second identity," and reveled in a friend's jibe that he spoke French like a guttersnipe.[29]

When Koether writes in English, she too is free with language in ways not possible in her native tongue. To read "Beets," the brief piece she published in *Made in USA* (2001), a journal produced by the handful of people who made up the Bernadette Corporation, is to judge it worthy of its context. Founded in 1994, the group's fluctuating membership adopted the "identity" of the corporation "as the perfect alibi for not having to fix an identity."[30] No wonder they also fostered the invention of Reena Spaulings, a name that notoriously stands for an artistic persona, a collectively written novel, and an art gallery. Koether still shows there today.[31]

In Koether's "Beets," declarations abound: "I'm just a hungry shopper." "A whole Roman empire is opening at my feet." "The store is my stage and stadium." To my (American) ears these phrases hit the nail on the head, which leads to a final suggestion: perhaps it is right to say that in the United States Koether was able to develop a second identity—if not a self, then at least a comfortable otherness to use as a mode of expression. There, she seemed truly at home. She found Barnes & Noble, the bookstore that promptly became a home away from home, "the most therapeutic space there is." "All my longing took shape right there. How to make thoughts move into the visual world…. Now my notebooks are flooding over, saturated with stories of will, defeat, fate and fire … it's the strangest site. Impossible to consume. In permanent flux. It's like a weirdly positive sedated scene." How striking it seems that life in the United States transformed Koether into such an inspired observer: free in a way seemingly never quite possible in Cologne. In New York she trained her "tainted gaze" on everyday life, and so discovered its "weirdly positive paradox." Somehow this brave new temple of consumption "basically neutralizes all wishes to consume in the future." What a lesson! Read Koether: she'll wake anybody up. It's not a moment too soon.

NOTES

1. Kim Gordon, "Jutta Koether: The inside job," *Flash Art*, January–February 2011, www.flashartonline.com/article/jutta-koether.
2. *SPEX* was co-founded in Cologne in 1980 by the artist Peter Bömmels (b. 1951); see an interview with him conducted by Hugo Hoppmann in 2009, available at www.hugohoppmann.com/blog/interview-peter-bommels/. In the years since, *SPEX* has weathered many changes, including its relocation to Berlin and its migration to an online format. It continues to publish at www.spex.de. A selection of Koether's own contributions to *SPEX*, the earliest dated 1982, one year after she began to work there, are included in Jutta Koether, *Kairos: Texte zu Kunst und Musik* (*Kairos: Texts on Art and Music*) (Berlin/Amsterdam: Edition ID-Archiv, 1996).
3. Jutta Koether, in her untitled contribution to *Make Your Own Life: Artists In & Out of Cologne, ed.* Bennett Simpson, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 38. On the topic of Cologne in the 1980s, see also: Lucia Beyer and Karen Marta, "Report from Germany: Why Cologne?," *Art in America*, December 1988, 44–51; Daniel Birnbaum, "Ripening on the Rhine: The Cologne Art World of the 1980s," *Artforum*, March 2003, 216–21; and, most recently, Johanna Burton, "A Will to Representation: Eau de Cologne, 1985–1993," in *Witness to Her Art*, ed. Rhea Anastas and Michael Brenson (New York: Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies, 2006), 191–212. I am particularly grateful to Monika Sprüth and to the staff of Sprüth Magers London, especially Bo Bottomley, for their responsiveness to my questions and their generosity with research materials.
4. Simpson, *Make Your Own Life, 8.*
5. Simpson, 9.
6. Simpson, 8–9.
7. Simpson, 9.
8. Simpson specifically invokes Foucault in the introduction to his catalogue on page 27, note 3.
9. I refer here to Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Each of these landmark studies laid the foundation for its author's career.
10. Paul Stephens, "Pretending to be Real: Stephen Greenblatt and the Legacy of Popular Existentialism," *New Literary History* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 492. Stephens invokes Greenblatt's surprised realization that those aspects of his subject matter that seemed to conjure an "identity freely chosen" in fact reveals selfhood to be a "cultural artifact." The citation Stephens uses comes from Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 256. It is surely worth noting that the story Stephens tells of Greenblatt's realization, through his work on Shakespeare, that the individual experiences "no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity," makes one wonder if a woman of Greenblatt's generation would ever make that mistake.
11. Fanny Benichou, Émilie Bujès, and Aurélien Gamboni, "Roleplaying: A Conversation with Jutta Koether," August 2007, 2, www.ag-archives.net/rawfX686Z73tA/agtxt_J_Koether.pdf, 2.
12. Koether, in Simpson, 38.
13. Koether, in Simpson, 38.
14. Koether, in Simpson, 38.
15. The context, tellingly, was a 1991 interview conducted by Koether: Jutta Koether, "Martin Kippenberger Interview," in *Martin Kippenberger: I Had a Vision* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1991), 21.
16. Koether, "Martin Kippenberger Interview," 21.
17. The exhibition, held at Galerie Sophia Ungers in Cologne, took as its motto "Niemand ist eine Frau" (Anonymous is a woman). The roots of this phrase, a touchstone of twentieth-century feminism, can be traced to Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), chapter 3: "I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a women.'"

Jutta Koether

Oh, ah, das Feuer!

von
Mrs. Benway

JUTTA KOETHER
. . . OHNE TITEL – 1984

„Wehe mir! In Feuer
Eingehüllt, fall' ich hinab
Schatten reiß' ich mit
Daß ich selbst mich nicht mehr
sehe,

Harte Felsbrocken
Schlagen mir mein Inneres auf
Eh' sie mich verschütten ..."
(Calderon)

„Oh, ja das Feuer. Ich sitze auf einer Parkbank und spiele mit ihm herum, erzeuge mechanisch eine Flamme nach der anderen. Die Zeigefingerkuppe ist schon ganz aufgeribbelt. Zack. Silbernes Rädchen am roten Einwegplastikgriff und schon hab' ich eine neue Flamme. Es dämmert schon, doch die Umrisse sind noch nicht allzu versteckt. Ich drehe weiter an dem silbernern Rädchen damit sich ein Bewußtsein persönlicher Würde einstellt. Ja, so einfach ist das. Nicht nur Wärme, sondern auch Licht ohne Kunst zubereiten, ja Licht auf eine Sache werfen.

Es ist schon ein wenig kühl. Rührend anhänglich – diese Gänsehaut, wenn das Licht verlöscht. Wahrscheinlich gebe ich gerade ein schrecklich miserables Bild ab,: Halb ermattet, halb unruhig auf einer Parkbank sitzend ein Feuer entzündend, das nicht weiter aufleuchtet bis als bis auf die eigene Hand, nur um dann festzustellen, daß er Recht gehabt hatte als er sagte: „Deine Haut ist nicht mehr so durchsichtig wie früher." So etwas brennt wirklich, sodig im Magen.

Von drüben schreckt mich ein Kinderkreischen, so laut daß mir das blöde kleine rote Feuerzeug fast aus der Hand fällt. Sie müssen so viel Krach machen, denn ohne Kracht macht Kriegspielen keinen Spaß.

Sieg! Sieg! Einer der stärksten Jungen hat ein jüngeres dünnes Kind beiseite gezerrt und führt ihm vor, wie man die letzten sich im Park befindlichen Blüten – etwas schon verendendes Gelbes am effektivsten als Wurfgeschosse benutzen kann. Aber weil die Blüten schon zu schlaff sind, seine ganze große Vorstellung sabotieren, gerät er in Wut und rächt sich an ihnen, indem er (sie in kürzester Zeit vollständig zerrupft. „Los Du auch!" Doch der kleine dünne mit seine unreifen Fingern will nicht, will die Blüten einfach nur abpflücken. „Man, bist Du blöde!" Seine laute schon fast männliche Stimme durchstößt selbst die dicken Hecken als er davonstürmt: *„Sieg, Sieg!"*

Das Feuer flammt wieder auf. Die Hecke steht da wie eine steife dunkelgrüne Wand, vor der ein Haufen gilblicher Blütenreste ihre Tage beschließen. Es gibt reinliche Farben, schmutzige und reine Farben. Mmh...feinsinnige Betrachtungen in der Dämmerung? Nein, ich bestehe nur darauf, daß dieses Stilleben eine gewisse Zartheit hat, die nicht übersehen werden darf, auch wenn sie einem sehr unzarten Vorgang entsprungen ist. Zartheit heißt nicht: Pastellfarben. Gebrechlich, heißt nur, daß auch Armseligkeit und Kleinheit der gemeinen Vorgänge in Form gebracht, und in satten Farben geschildert über das Arm – und Kleinsein raus stoßen müssen.

Ja, reinliche Farben sind nun wirklich das letzte, reine Farben sind etwas wunderbares, aber durch die schmutzigen muß man hindurch. Da gibts gar nichts. Durch den Dreck muß man, damit man schließlich die Dinge sehen kann, die man nicht sehen kann, damit sich Unschuld, Erfahrung und die eingebildete Erfahrung ordentlich zusammengeklumpt erden um dann kurz triumphal aufzuleuchten und nocheinmal und nocheinmal. Ah...Sieg...Sieg! Mit diesem kleinen Feuerzeug kann man glatt den Blick nach oben aufhalten, zumindest soweit, daß das „Oben" in ein Verhältnis zum Rest gestellt wird. Und überhaupt, von oben kommt im Moment sowieso kein Licht mehr herunter. Es dämmert und meine Pupillen sind schon heftig angeschwollen, weil ich die Details von Hecken und Blumen und Kindern anstarre. Alles falsch: Der Park ist verrottet, alles was sich darin bewegt ist verrottet und das Betrachten von Blumen ist nun wirklich eine plumpe und Billige Art der Annäherung an das, was man ein Leben nennen möchte. Läßt einen nur wieder wünschen, an wäre bei der Planung beteiligt gewesen.

Feuer, Feuer, 1000 mal für nur 99 Pfennig. Spottbillig, lächerlich, sentimental! Tausendmal das silberne Rädchen betätigt, wie wunderbar romantisch! Kein Wunder, daß die Haut dann nicht mehr an den Fingerkuppen dann nicht mehr durchsichtig ist, sondern dick und strap zierfähig nach tausendmal drehen. So bekommen lächerlich-romantische Vorhaben ihren strapazierfähigen logischen Schluß. Das kleine, übriggebliebene Kind aber stellt sich mittenrein in den Schluß.

Hat sich von dem Hecken und Blumenstilleben losgerissen und sich dem stinkenden Tümpel, der irgendwann einmal ein Brunnen gewesen ist und im Sommer als Planschbecken für die Kinder gedient hat zu. Mittendrin ein sich auflösender Pappkarton. Das papierene Elend ist sein Schiff. Das Mädchen ist Reeder und Kapitän zugleich. Die schmierige Wasseroberfläche, die fettigen Papierreste, die Blätter, die heruntergefallen sind ohne je auf den Boden zu gelangen, die leeren Flaschen, all das bereitet ihm nach dem totalen Blumendisaster eine Art unverhofftes neues Glück.

Der Karton weicht auf, der Kahn droht unterzugehen. Sie kramt ein Päckchen Streichhölzer aus ihrer Rocktasche und steckt ihn mit einem triumphierenden Blick in Brand: „Seht her, ich bin nicht das Opfer der Umstände, sondern einer der die Umstände beeinflußt" und zufrieden zwirbelt sie an ihrem Haar und zieht sich den Rauch seines abbrennenden Luxusdampfers in die Nase, als sie mich in ihrem Siegesblickfeld entdeckt. Steht auf und grinst. Ertappt. Erst ein wenig verlegen, rührt sich nicht von der Stelle, die grasigen Knie über den schmuddlig-blauen Strümpfen sitzen fest auf den stämmigen kleinen Beinen. Schmutzige Farben, ja schmutzige Farben, es ist fast dunkel – Ausgebrannt hat es sich, tausendmal. Dann wirft man das Ding weg. Es gibt mindestens eine Million Einwegfeuerzeuge auf dieser Welt. Es ist zu spät als daß ich ihr sagen könnte: Laß ' dich nicht stören. Sie hat mich entdeckt und ihr verlegenes Grinsen dehnt sich zu einem breiten gemeinen aus. Ich bitte Dich – ich habe mir nichts vorzuwerfen, hab ja nur zu dir herübergeschaut, weil ich eine plumpe Art der Annäherung vermeiden wollte. Hätte Dir auch mein Feuerzeug anbieten können, aber ich wollte ja nicht persönlich werden. Weil es einfach scheußlich ist, daß Frauen immer persönlich werden müssen. Ich möchte nur diese eine Anmerkung durchlassen:

Meine Haut ist nicht mehr so durchsichtig wie früher. Ich bin nicht mehr sehr jung. Unter meiner Mütze kommen lange dunkle Haare hervor und ich lebe alleine. Meine Augen sind als mittelgroße Knöpfe aufgewachsen, heute sind sie jedoch fast immer sehr groß und geschwollen, weil ich mir angewöhnt habe, alles Gedruckte und alles was sich vor ihnen bewegt anzusehen, aufzunehmen zu fressen. Dann

beginnen sie zu brennen hören aber immer noch nicht auf mich um mehr FEuer anzubetteln. Unersättlich, diese Biester. Dann habe ich beschlossen ihnen nichts mehr durchgehen zu lassen, ihnen ein reguliertes Feuer geben, lichte kleine Punkte der Erregung sozusagen fein ins tägliche Leben eingesetzt. Feine Lüge. Nicht ich habe ertappt, sondern sie hat mich ertappt und hat schon den Mund offen, wird mir gleich zurufen *„Feuer"* mit den Armen wedeln, sich in einen heißblütigen Krieger verwandeln, härter als jede Amazone, die schon härter als die härtesten Krieger waren, und sich in die Schlacht werfen bis alle Munition verdonnert ist. Ich aber bin im Besitz des Feuerzeugs und das schaut sie begehrlich an. Was denn nun. Willst Du Amazone sein oder Berichterstatter? In jedem Fall, laß 'die dämlich Einbildung beiseite, diese Vorsicht, den Bau den Du errichtest, das Sicherheitsschloß. Das „nichts- das nicht offen – offen– und einfach-wäre" kann nur in eine verdammte Kläglichkeit ausarten, wenn es nicht sogleich ausgeführt wird. Hier handelt es sich nicht nur eine Formfrage. Niemals würde einer „Niederlage, Niederlage!" laut durch den Park rufen, auch wenn er wüßte, daß die vom Staub verklebten dunkelgrünen Hecken diesen Ruf aufschlukken könnten. Unangenehm, seine Niederlagen zu überdenken! Parkbänke scheinen geschaffen für Niederlagen und dem was ihnen folgt: *Strategien* für einen Sieg.

Tatsächlich hatte er sich niedergelegt, dieser Mann. Genauer gesagt, vor fünf Monaten, an dieser Stelle, wo ich immer noch sitze, obwohl es schon dämmert und die Feuchtigkeit in meine Kleiderfalten zieht, hatte er sich nach einigen Stunden ihrer Bekanntschaft einfach niedergelegt, geradewegs seinen Kopf auf ihren Schoß gebettet. Mein Gott, er hätte ja wenigstens ein kleines intimes Annäherungsmanöver vorführen können, nach der Uhrzeit fragen, sich bücken um irgendetwas aufzuheben, oder um Feuer bitten können. Empörung hatte sich mit Verachtung gemischt, bevor sie die Komik dieser Situation ganz erfassen konnte. Während sie auf ihn heruntersah verwundert, daß seine Haut am Hals fast transparent erschien, obwohl er doch ein Mann und kein Junge war, beschloß sie trotz aller gemischter Gefühle, daß sie zumindest die Schönheit dieses Ausschnitts, der sich ihr so unverwunden darbot zu genießen. „Ich bin nur etwas müde. Habe letzte Nacht nicht geschlafen!" hatte er gesagt. Ah! Durchsichtiger als durchsichtig war das, wunderbar durchsichtig. Obwohl sie immer noch einen halben Meter über seinem Kopf schwebte hatte er mit dieser Bemerkung ihr ganzes Gebäude zum Einstürzen gebracht und das Lachen was dann folgte glich einem Erdbeben dem sich ein Feuer anschließt, dessen Flammen heftig an der partiellen Machtübernahme zügelten. Na bitte – das wirft doch ein Licht auf die Sache. ...„nichts was nicht offen und einfach wäre" – die Offenheit in Person liegt auf meinem Schoß ... Was blieb ihr also übrig als ein tieftragischer entzückter Blick mit einer spitzen Bemerkung zu kombinieren? –

Ah, die ganze Nacht nicht geschlafen, machen Künstler wohl so? Hast Du mal Feuer? Und während sich der Zigarettenrauch vor ihrer Nase ausbreitete dachte sie daran wie schön es gewesen wäre, wenn sie diese letzte Nacht mit ihm verbracht hätte. Ah – wie kann man etwas wollen, das schon Vergangenheit ist, sich wünschen man wäre beteiligt gewesen? – Ein Oh! war ihm entfahren, als sie sich allen Feuers und Rauchs entledigt zu ihm heruntergebeugt und die transparente Stelle am Hals geküsst hatte. „Warum guckst Du so komisch?" Das Mädchen reckt sein schmutziges rosiggeflecktes Kinn hoch, ein Blick abwechselnd vorwurfsvoll auf mein Gesicht und begehrend und eindringlich auf das Feuerzeug in meiner Hand gerichtet. „Ich habe gerade an eine Geschichte gedacht, die eine Freundin mir erzählt hat. Die Geschichte hat sich genau hier auf dieser Bank abgespielt und sie handelt von ...

Es ist jetzt schon sehr dunkel, doch ich sehe nun ganz genau was sie von mir will. In ihrer linken Hand habe ich einen fast unversehrten Pappkarton entdeckt. Ganz wie ich selber – Wiederholungstäter ... die Geschichte wiederholt sich, aber als Farce. Können wohl noch einige Dinge in Brand gesetzt werden, bevor die 1000 voll sind. Ich reiche das kleine rote Plastikding von meiner in ihre Hand herüber, sie greift zu und rennt schnell weg, während ich meinen Satz beende" ... handelt von *Feuer* !"

JUTTA KOETHER
1958 in Köln geboren
lebt und arbeitet in Köln
ab 1981 . . . Texte für SDEX-Musik, zur Zeit Kunstreviews + Katalogbeitrage „Geschichte der Louise L." in RA-WUMMS, K & W, Köln
ab 1984 Ausstellungen in Köln, Krefeld, Roven und Graz

JUTTA KOETHER FOTOGRAFIERT VON LISA VALDER

Jutta Koether (as Mrs. Benway), "Oh, ah, das Feuer!," *Eau de Cologne 1*, 1985, 44–45.

18. On Rosenbach, see (in addition to *Eleven*, *Verstehen ist wie Hitze*, a 1985 video by the artist accessible at www.stiftung-imai.de/b_katalog/archiv?a_id=432) a review of a 2017 show by Rosenbach staged at Priska Pasquer in Cologne: Noemi Smolik, "Ulrike Rosenbach," *frieze*, June 14, 2017, https://frieze.com/article/ulrike-rosenbach. Note too that in the interview Buchloh conducted with Koether in 2016, it is the art historian's mention of Rosenbach that turns the conversation toward Koether's recognition that it was necessary "to find my coordinates as an artist on my own." And this in turn led her to painting. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "A Conversation with Jutta Koether," October, no. 157 (Summer 2016): 17. It is in the course of this exchange that Koether memorably speaks of her realization that, as she so beautifully phrased it, "My mind is painted."

19. This adroit move is one that Koether brings off more than once while talking to Buchloh. Take, for example, the moment when he expresses his bemusement that she managed to "bypass the Dada legacy." Her reply: "What I think you don't understand is that my generation—or maybe I should only speak for myself—*lost*, or rather *refused*, this kind of connection to thinking in a linear trajectory. We—I—experienced it as the second-order culture, as having been or always being the one behind, always the 'born too late,' always the inheritor *of* …'' Buchloh, "A Conversation," 22. Note that this response, with its refusal of a "linear trajectory," implicitly favors a view of history quite distinct from the politically correct lineage to which Buchloh has remained faithful.

20. Buchloh, "A Conversation," 16.

21. Jan Verwoert, "Days of Our Lives," *frieze*, November–December 2006, https://frieze.com/article/days-our-lives.

22. Benichou, Bujès, and Gamboni, 2

23. Posing in this photograph are (left to right) Charline von Heyl, Michaela Eichwald, Jutta Koether, Cosima von Bonin, and Isabelle Graw. All are more or less of a similar age (born between 1958 and 1967), and all continue to exhibit or practice today.

24. The phrase "third-generation women," apparently coined by Koether, turns up in an essay by her: Jutta Koether, "3rd-Generation-Women Fem-Trash-Manifesto," *Eau de Cologne 3*, 1989, 56–61.

25. Benichou, Bujès, and Gamboni, 2

26. Jutta Koether, *f.* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 21; Isabelle Graw and Daniel Birnbaum, editors of the 2015 edition, see in the "f" of Koether's title a "new plural" (page 6): the artist herself.

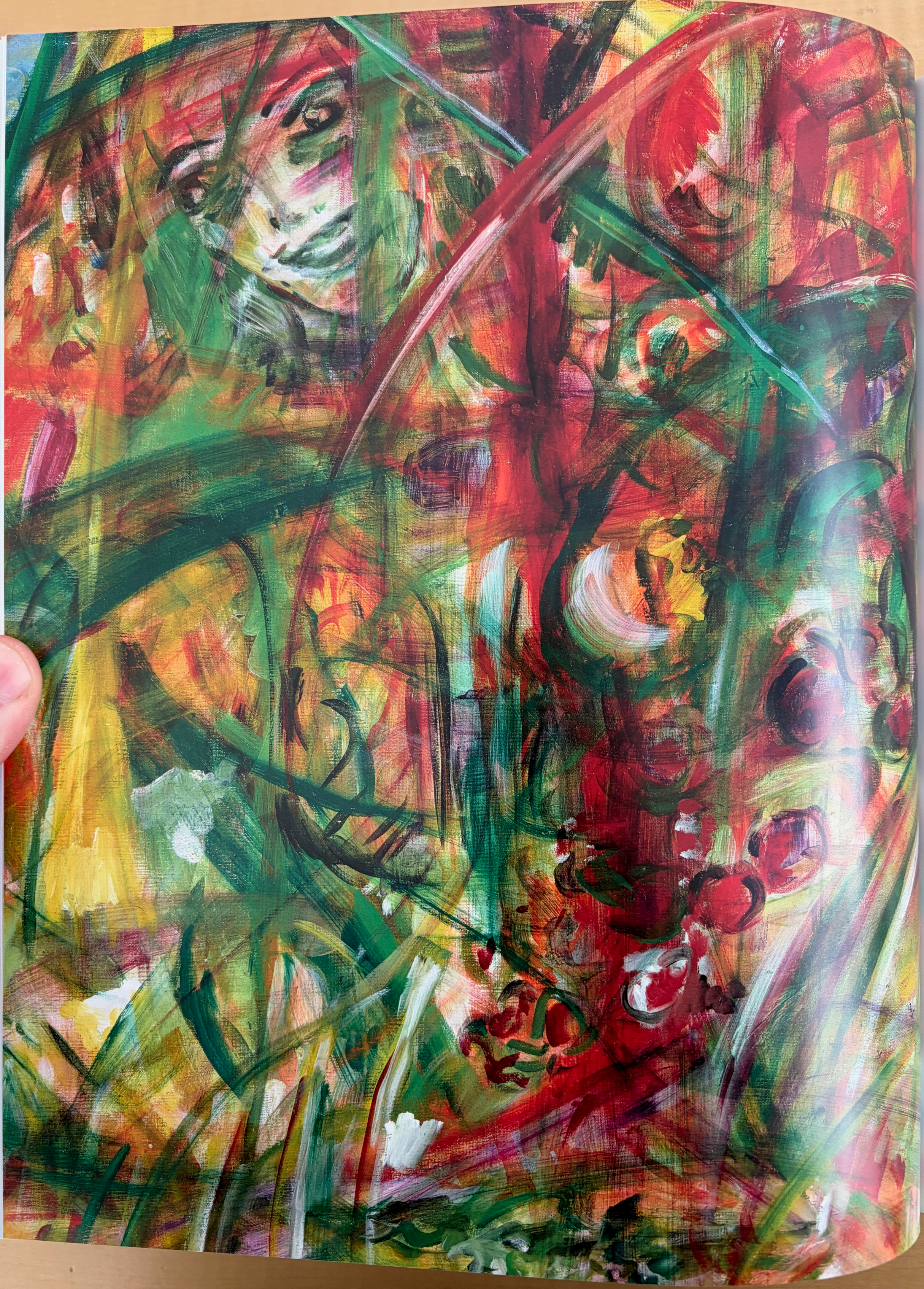
27. The editors of *Eau de Cologne 3* do not provide a source for this citation. Eva Meyer, b. 1950, lives in Berlin. The essay by Meyer included in this issue of the magazine references Meyer's book *Die Autobiographie der Schrift* (Basel: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1989).

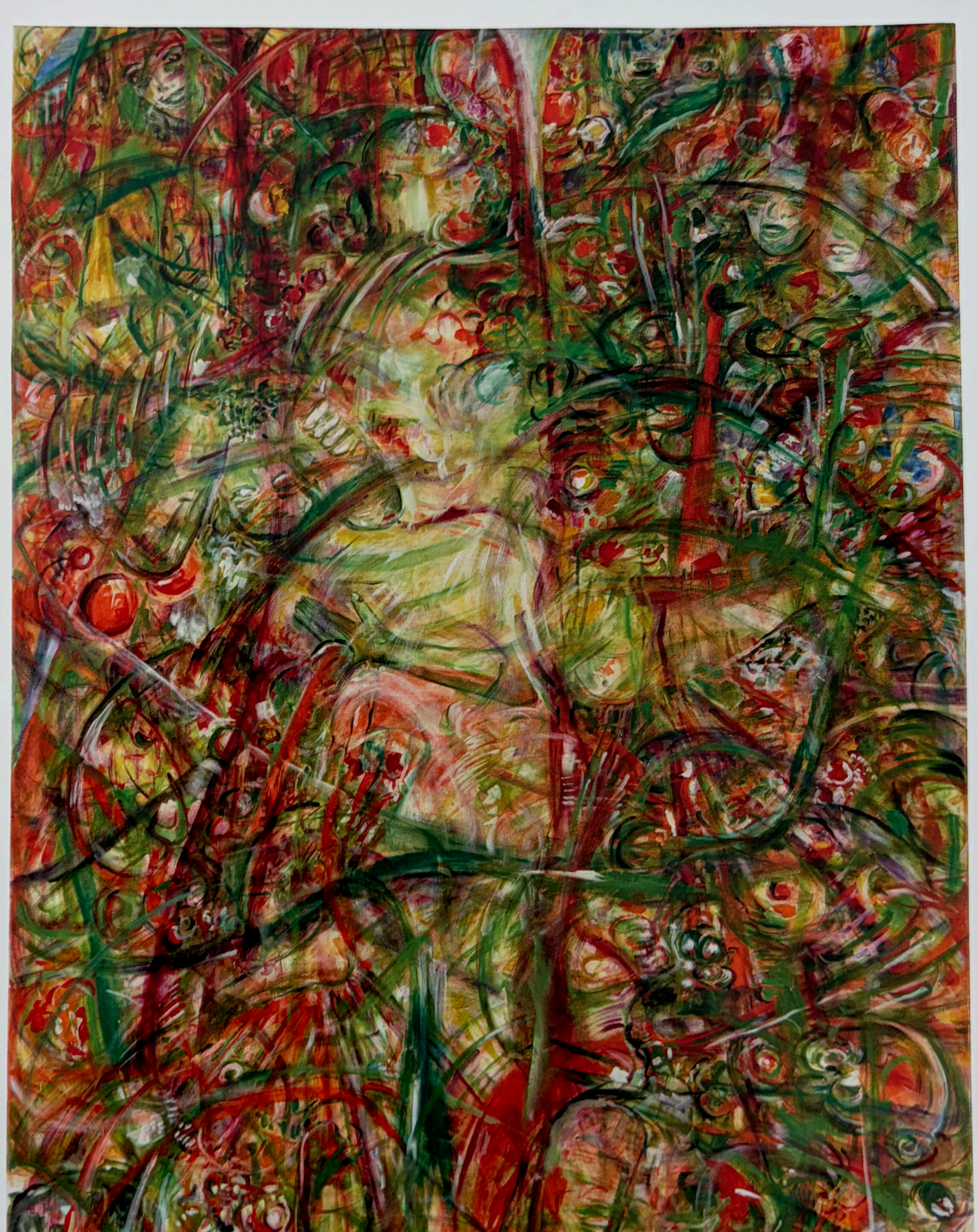
28. Jutta Koether, "Interview with Rosemarie Trockel," trans. John Lundon, *Flash Art*, May 1987, 40–42.

29. For a sense of Cobb's individuality, see David A. Bell, "Bastille Days," *New York Times*, April 18, 1999, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/18/books/bastille-days.html, a review of Richard Cobb's *The French and Their Revolution: Selected Writings*, ed. David Gilmour (New York: New Press, 1999); the story about Cobb's mastery of French is also told there.

30. As quoted in Bennett Simpson, "Techniques of Today," *Artforum*, September 2004, https://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=200407&id=7397, 220–223.

31. For the complete text of the novel, see https://monoskop.org/images/4/46/Bernadette_Corporation_Reena_Spaulings.pdf.





THROUGH SUN, MOON, AND STARS
JUTTA KOETHER IN THE 1990s

Achim Hochdörfer

Jutta Koether, *There is simply no substitute for frequent meetings of individuals with similar ideas (Otto Fenichel)* 1999.
Acrylic on canvas, twenty-three parts, each: 5 inches (12.5 cm) diam.

A hundred years after its creation, the dramatically swirling celestial turbulence of Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1889) seems to have frozen into a cliché. The visual excesses that Georges Bataille once saw in the spinning suns of van Gogh's late work have paled. Forgotten is the inner turmoil that Antonin Artaud saw not only in the artist's paintings, but also in his mental anguish and suicide, a desperate railing against the capitalist social order.[1] The expressionist view of van Gogh is that he was an artist who unmasked a false "respect for power and magnitude" in paintings that "rage with the storm of all those emotions in the experience of which the individual of van Gogh's epoch for the first time registered the historical catastrophe."[2] These "pathos formulas" were banished to an irretrievable past when the death of painting was declared in the 1980s. Yet their creation is nevertheless inextricably linked with van Gogh's posthumous ascent to the status of a veritable pop star of modern art. Reproduced en masse, his *The Starry Night* encapsulates the tension between inner protest and capitalist commercialization, between inner sensibility and cosmological kitsch. It is as though the arabesques in the sky represent the irreconcilable struggle in which the authentic is sought amid the inauthentic.

64 In her 1988 appropriation *Starry Night I*, Koether adopts two key aspects of van Gogh's painting: the swirling sky and the cypress tree. The picturesque village with its sharp church spire is replaced by a kind of inner landscape with amorphous figures that exist like organs in a body. On the lower right-hand edge of the painting, a crusty giant with a bulbous nose seems to be wearing the hilltop as a hat. His gaze is directed toward an embryo that has nestled into the inner earth. From its amniotic sac emerges one of the round, knobbly forms that have been a feature of Koether's work since 1983, and which might variously be interpreted, depending on context, as an apple, a breast, a head, an eye, or even a cell. It joins a throng of similar forms teeming down the hillside, like van Gogh's cosmic mists, right into the base of a smoldering cypress. There, dramatic scenes unfold. We see figures with bowed heads, their hands raised up, as though they were burning in the fires of hell or cheering at a pop concert. "I spent twenty minutes in hell" is the refrain in Koether's 1989 artist book *20 Minuten* of the same time.[3] In an idiosyncratic cross between a Patti Smith pose and Camille Claudel's late-nineteenth-century *L'Implorante*, the path continues upward through a glowing chasm through which the knobbly spheres are catapulted into the bright-red night sky, where they are transformed into the moon and stars. The smoldering cypress forms a compositional link, breaking through the horizon line and overcoming the separation between above and below, earth and sky, inside and outside. The last offshoot of the rippling celestial wave unites—in contrast to van Gogh—with one of the sparkling stars.

65 In a second version, *Starry Night II* (1988), Koether ramps up the expressionist ductus. The lurid contrast of yellow and red sets the surface in motion and also tips the visual elements into hysteria.[4] The embryo is transformed into a shapeless entity with a trunk bending downward, spewing yellow and orange brushstrokes. Its rump, which echoes the oscillations of the celestial wave, churns out the cells that are about to be catapulted skyward. What was a nocturnal scene now appears as bright as day—the stars have turned into glowing, turning suns that stare out of the picture as though from red-rimmed eye sockets. One year later, in her 1989 painting *Subject is the absolute Unrest of Becoming*, these sun wheels finally come into their own. They take over the entire picture plane, so that the distinction between above and below, inside and outside, is completely abrogated. Even the arabesques of the celestial waves have been set in motion. From the lower right-hand edge, they rise upward in two streams to embrace a radiant head, like the arms of a dancing figure. Alternating playfully between the abstract and the figurative, these streams take on the form of a womb that delivers the sun wheels into the picture plane through its meandering ovaries—as forms whose significance remains unclear, as nascent embodiments of stars, suns, stroboscopes, noteheads, probes, magnetic fields. At once passive and active, they absorb information from all directions and transform it into visual energy, which they cast back like lightning flashes.[5] 66

Koether's appropriation of van Gogh in no way fits the prevalent definition of appropriation art. For her *Starry Night* is not a detached or ideologically driven critical analysis aimed at revealing the corruption of the original. On the contrary: as an artist, Koether immersed herself in van Gogh's compositional logic and in the history of the reception of his work, while at the same time implanting her work into the body of the painting—like an antibody—in order to release its encapsulated intensity, which Meyer Shapiro has described, in reference to *The Starry Night*, as an "apocalyptic fantasy."[6] In reworking the masterpieces of the modern age, Koether, as she puts it, seeks to "rework painting … artificially authentic with oilpaint, with red color as surface (horizontally expanding) penetration, burning up itself, kind of grotesque, as eclecticism becomes a physical necessity, at the origin of the world, at death, in hell, with starry nights…. FemTrash cultivates intense relations with masterpieces."[7]

Seeing Stars

The incisiveness of Koether's exploration of van Gogh's *The Starry Night* is particularly evident when viewed against the backdrop of the polemical debate that raged in the 1980s over the survival or death of painting. The categorizations deployed by art critics—advanced photography versus outmoded painting, critical appropriation art versus reactionary neo-expressionism—had become entrenched, leading to a situation so polarized that every nuance risked being regarded as a false compromise. By the mid-1980s, the furor of Neue Wilde painting was waning, and the "death of painting" seemed to be an incontrovertible historical fact. Many of the artists close to Koether—notably Albert Oehlen and Rosemarie Trockel—experienced a crisis, or turned away from painting and abandoned their neo-expressionist roots. Koether swam against the tide, clinging to an expressionist

Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 29 × 36 inches (73.7 × 92.1 cm)

painterly idiom, which would directly impact her career as an artist. She gained recognition first and foremost as a pop journalist and art critic. Between 1987 and 1991, she had only one solo exhibition as an artist. Her increasing frustration with this situation went hand in hand with her growing affinity for the New York art scene. She made friends with artists John Miller, Mike Kelley, and Mary Heilmann, and came into contact with gallerists Pat Hearn and Colin de Land. Koether describes her 1991 move to New York, in retrospect, as a "self-displacement" that involved distancing herself consciously from the Cologne scene in order to position herself anew in a different context.[8]

Koether had her first public appearance in New York in January 1991 with *Kissing the Canvas*. It is a term used in sport: "The artist as painter in the image of the boxer, almost on the floor, near the canvas. Not quite beaten K.O. by the rest surrounding him."[9] As part of a weekly lecture-performance series, Koether presented a text with the same title and interacted with her paintings. Speaking and seeing, painting and action, were interlinked. Based on the image of the boxer in the arena of spectacle, reeling and being counted out, with defeat in sight and exposed to the gaze and jeering of the audience, Koether developed and asserted her own historic and aesthetic position. The kiss marks the moment in which action and image, outside and inside, the low point and the plenitude of painting collide in ecstasy and exhaustion. What is remarkable is not only the decisiveness with which Koether rejects the postmodern assertion of the death of painting, but also the way she argues for an expansion of both modernism *and* pop. It is about a return to the pathos formulas of modernism and, at the same time, about engaging with the "comical, sarcastic, arrogant, cool and full-on filth" of the culture industry.[10] It is along these lines that Koether weaves her moving network of "deliberate ambiguities," which mutually energize, destroy, and refashion one another.

67 In her diptych *Kissing the Canvas* (1990), the sweeping lines and knobbly spheres of *Starry Night* morph into a carnivalesque scene. They transform into conglomerations of human heads, flashing lights, and rhythmic beats. A champagne glass pushes into the plane of the right-hand panel, pouring bubbles into the image space. Spirals unfurl like ticker tape among the visual elements, creating links and crossings-out (e.g., Koether's signature), setting markers (e.g., the *S* of "KISS"), encircling and enfolding. Across the edges of the paintings, they bridge the gap between the two panels, which also separates the work title and Koether's signature. In the midst of the tumult, directly beneath "KISSING," a white hole gapes like a wound, a crater, a vulva—or at any rate, an opening through which visual elements spill onto the picture plane. It is as though we are looking down on the open cypress abyss of the *Starry Night* paintings; into the fomenting hell of the interior, just before an eruption illuminates the nocturnal sky. The fallen boxer rises from the floor, seeing stars before his eyes.

Koether presented new groups of work in two programmatic solo exhibitions, held in 1991 and 1992 respectively: *koether: massen – malerei und versammlung* at the Generali Foundation, Vienna, and *100% Malerei. Niemand ist eine Frau* at Galerie Sophia Ungers in Cologne. Large-format tableaux now began to take the place of her predominantly small-scale canvases of the 1980s. In works such as *ganz* and *völlig* (both 1991), the arabesque lines with their exuberant brushstrokes, wavy lines, spirals, shell-like rocailles, tick marks, and hatching develop a very transformational dynamic, interspersed with figurative motifs such as flowers, eggs, apples, and various mutations of the knobbly sphere. These converge into groups, withdraw into hidden nests, hatch new ideas, and teem like garlands and streamers through the image space. They seem to swarm outward across the edges of the paintings as though seeking contact with the outside world, while loading up with art historical references. In this, the arabesques act as channels of energy that guide the gaze effortlessly between figuration and abstraction, high art and decoration, the grotesque and the exquisite, text and image, order and chaos. As a stylistic means of transition, and as a figure of inversion, the arabesque is able to tip any given position into its opposite at any moment.[11] On the one hand, the composition triggers an expansive movement that dissolves the autonomy of the image into ornament. On the other hand, the arabesques can be read as an inward-moving impulse that allows a kind of *Weltinnenraum* ("world's inner space") to take shape.

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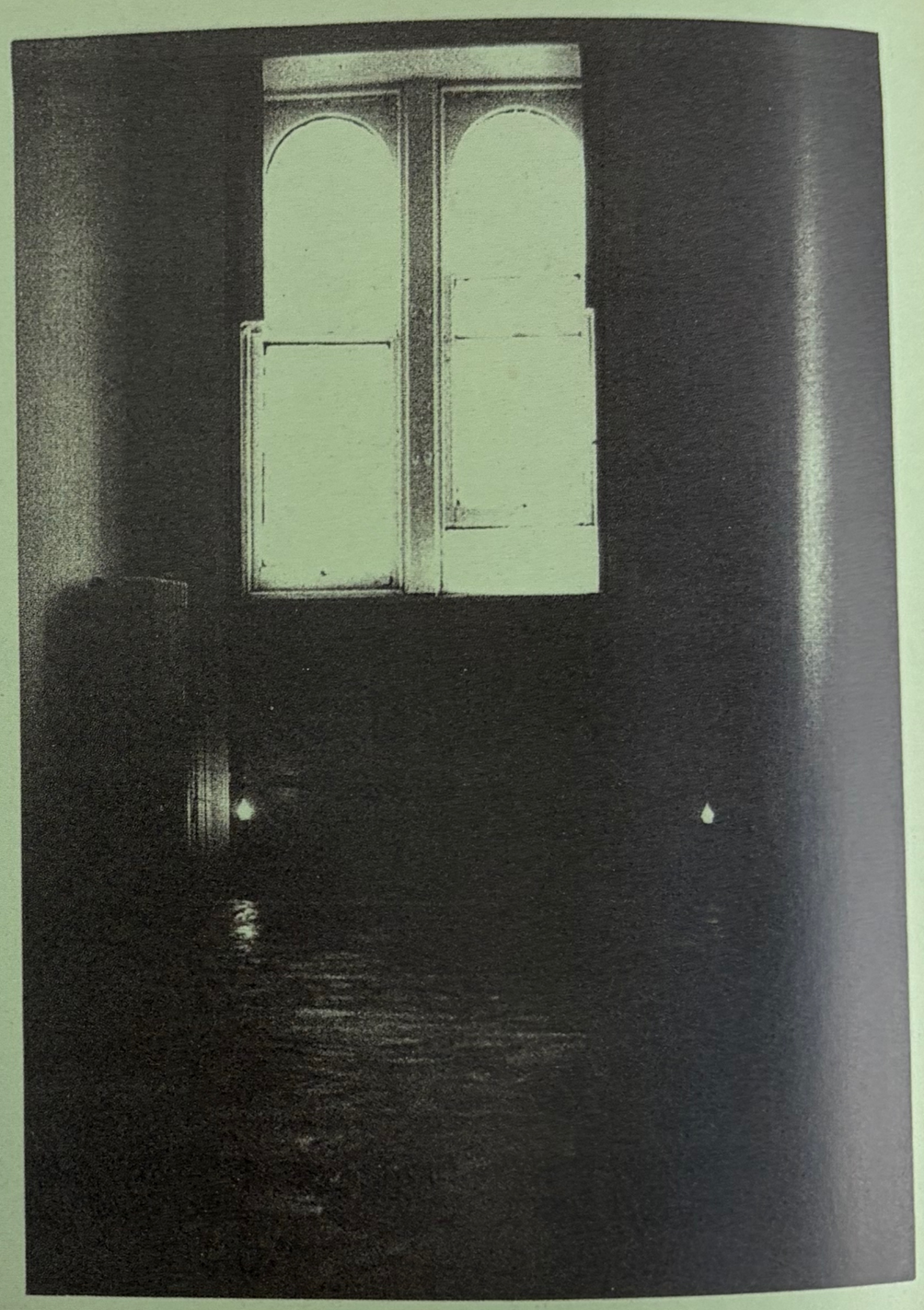
The female face at the center of *ganz* can be traced back to a 1989 drawing in which a head is projected onto a globe. In this regard, Koether demonstratively revisits the central theme of history painting: the overlap between subject and world, between existential emotion and historical experience. Written in large letters right across the forehead is the word *halal*—the term denoting what is permissible according to Islamic law—in reference to the increasing multiculturalism in the wake of the globalization following the fall of the Berlin Wall.[12] The face presents itself as a container of fragmented cultural information, as a processing machine with a lipsticked mouth, white teeth, and gleaming eyes,

Jutta Koether, *The Halal Drawings*, 1990. Watercolor and ink on paper, 10¾ × 8¼ inches (27.5 × 20.8 cm)



Jutta Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job* (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1993), n. p.

absorbing all manner of moods and affects, and churning them out again: loss, devotion, mourning, joy, rage, desire, hysteria, fear. These are affects that permeate all the stages of the depiction—from seemingly naive self-portrait to the history painting's assertive claim of representing a global subjectivity.[13]

With pictures such as *ganz*, Koether prods some highly sensitive nerves in the development of modern painting. Her arabesque harbors and prefigures the tension between ornamental adornment and autonomously expressive figure, between architectural wall decor and the artistic space of the work itself. Even in its beginnings, the arabesque already bore within it the seeds of the conflict that shaped the consolidation of the autonomous image in modernism. This conflict peaked dramatically in Abstract Expressionism: at the watershed of its development, modernist painting was heading inexorably toward its own dissolution. With that, decentralized and polyphonic allover compositions began to approximate their most implacable enemies—namely, decorative and commercially produced designs of "the kind seen in wallpaper patterns that can be repeated indefinitely."[14] In her exploration of the history of modern painting, Koether begins at this historic moment—not in order to parody it or even to overcome it, but rather to mobilize all its existential and historic dynamism.

Many Little Karoi

In the early 1990s, Koether began to explore the painterly tradition of Abstract Expressionism, systematically unraveling its formal and historiographical implications in a series of exhibitions. At the heart of these projects lay *Inside Job* (1992). Conceived as a performative installation in Koether's Manhattan studio, it consisted of three components that framed the relationship between image, subjective interior space, and external context. A large-format canvas spread out on the floor defined the central space. An adjacent storage space had been transformed into a small cabinet of curiosities containing objects that offered insight into her private life and thoughts: books, photographs, letters, all manner of notes [ill. p. 71]. Between them hung small-format pictures, many with erotic motifs.[15] An imaginary museum, a religious shrine, a storage cupboard, and a toilet—the space played with all of these ideas and ultimately transitioned into a separate third room, where a table and chairs invited conversation. Koether engaged the people visiting her exhibition in a dialogue that she documented in handwritten notes and made available in a visitors' book on the writing desk of the cabinet of curiosities.[16] A cross between sociological study and psychoanalytic session, *Inside Job* let Koether conjure a subtly differentiated, she conjured a subtly differentiated mood board of aesthetic viewpoints. In this way, not only the artist but also the visitors took on an active role in the "arena in which to act."[17]

71 Koether had already started work on the composition of *The one One* (1992) before the exhibition opened, then went on to alter and complement that image in direct response to the social dynamics of the project.[18] The dual-arch structure of the window frame in the room appears in the upper and lower areas of the image. In the swirling allover, there are multiple references to Koether's physical work on the ground: knees, thighs, elbows, underarms can all be seen scattered across the canvas in different positions and from different angles.[19] Ghostly faces push into the image from all sides, their speaking mouths and silent gazes commenting on what is happening. In between, there are erotic scenes derived from the forms and contents of the cabinet images, whose orgiastic atmosphere Koether describes as a series of "explosions, that amount of desire exploding, expressed in there, squeezed in that closet and then pouring out."[20] The struggle for position, the tensions and the urban hustle and bustle of New York, as well as desire and horror, fill the image space.

At the center of the image, along the vertical axis, is a schematic anthropomorphic figure, around and into which Koether has painted during the process of creating the work. At one early stage the figure appears as a dancer flitting across the picture plane like a flash of light. The leap stands for the vibrant exchange between image, artist, and social context.[21] In the final version, the dancer has disappeared; only her right foot, with which she has touched the canvas, remains visible just below the center. Otherwise, all that remains is a pale outline, like the ghostly emptiness of a subject whose kneeling legs and underarms have left some trace recalling the painterly process.[22] Ready to be hung vertically on the wall, it seems to vanish upward through the round arch of the window. At the same time, it is as though a monstrous embryo in profile, with a blue eye and a mouth gaping in a scream, can be discerned. It is a spectacle of death and resurrection, of dissolution and ecstatic reassembling of the image, "making the first and last paintings simultaneously, making conversations, enter the social fabric there. Get caught into the web. Entangle, Dis-Entangle. Observe and get involved."[23]

The pictorial concept established by Koether in the early 1990s reached its initial apex in her solo exhibition *Affective Import* at the Pat Hearn Gallery in 1993. The exhibition consisted of five large-format works, the so-called *Antibodies* (1993), which 78 addressed the emerging technoculture of the early 1990s, as well as German reunification and global finance. Here, Koether takes up the metaphor of the visual figure on the ground, as in *The one One,* whose lines run like cables or infusion tubes suffusing the body from the outside with emotional affects and social input. Even at first glance, the *Antibodies* seem to be mistreated and overwhelmed by the flood of information. The broken lines are redolent of scars, as though the entire picture plane had been ripped up and sewn back together again.

The colors and some of the motifs in *Antibody I (First Moment After Noon Night)* (1993) are derived from flyers for techno parties, with lettering that spells out "hard trance" running right across the painting and setting the beat and the rhythm. Beams lighting up all over the picture plane like small explosions create an electric, pulsating effervescence.[24] Hovering above the scene is a disco ball, a kabbalah tree, whose upper circle represents the *kether*—the brightest light of the universe—while at the same time referencing Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass*.[25]

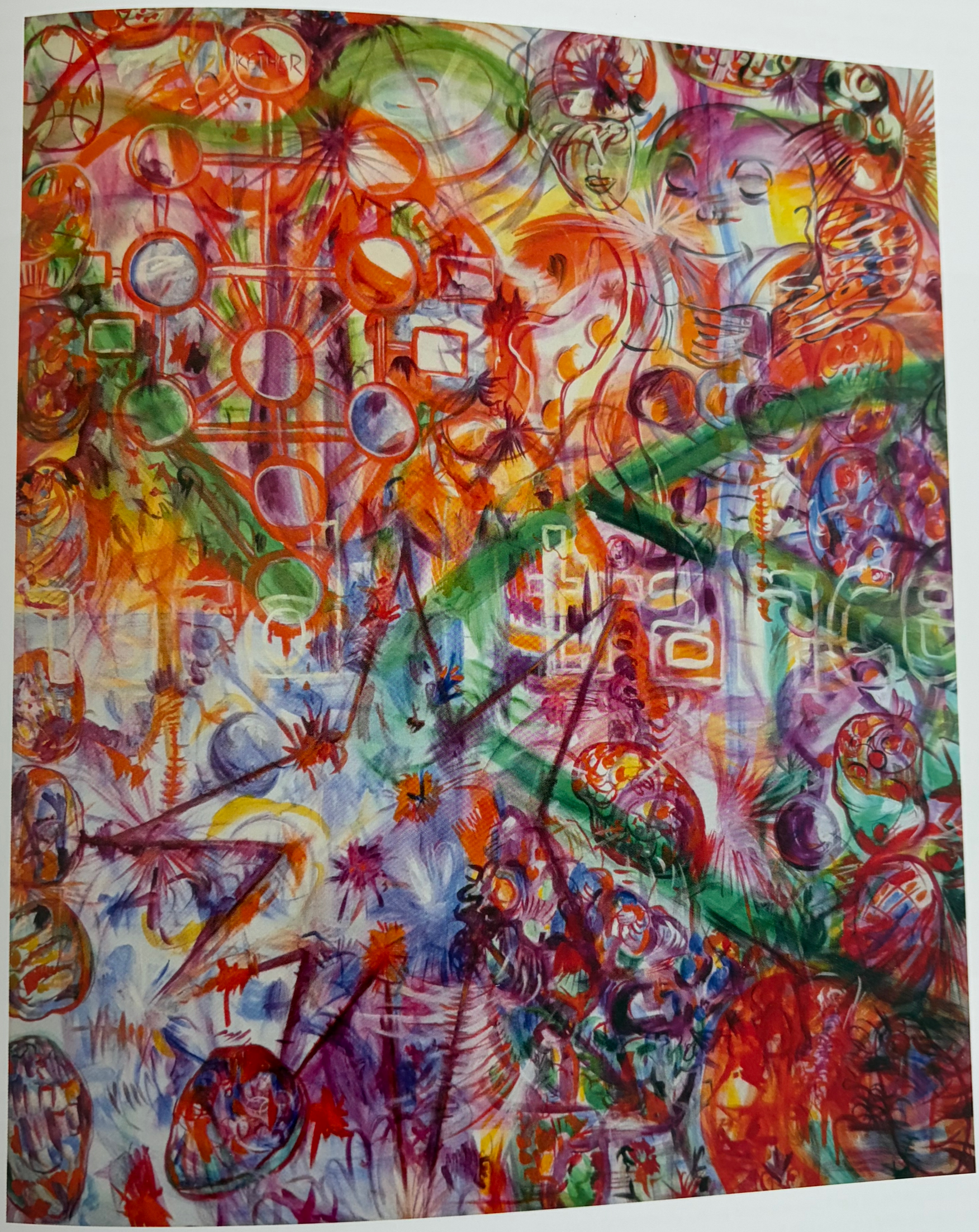
Next to that, on the right, are a female face and an egg-shaped Humpty Dumpty head reading a book together. The collisions of these visual elements discharge in little clicks, in temporal ecstasies, which Koether, alluding to the ancient Greek god Kairos (or Caerus), and the concept of *kairos*—the spontaneous and opportune moment—describes as "many little *kairoi*."[26] These small, spontaneous moments draw their intensity from various different directions and spheres of value, exploding at unpredictable points amid the "absolute unrest of Becoming."[27] In this respect, Koether's *kairos* differs fundamentally from the late-modernist concept of the emphatic moment—as expressed in Michael Fried's "presentness" or Karl Heinz Bohrer's "suddenness"—which constitutes an isolated moment of pure presence within a detachment from the social sphere.[28] Koether's *kairos*, by contrast, speaks "in many voices."[29] It insists on its own highly charged heterogeneity, rooted in solidarity with the "comical, sarcastic, arrogant, cool and full-on filth"[30] from which these voices have sprung.

Koether takes her involvement with the external and her engagement with the context of her immediate surroundings one step further in her second exhibition at Pat Hearn's gallery. Hearn was one of the first gallerists to move from SoHo to Chelsea, a vanguard of the mass exodus that would soon take place as many galleries relocated to the new hub of the booming art market. Following the success of *Affective Import*, which was acclaimed by critics and the public alike—every artwork in the exhibition sold—Koether opened the new venue in February 1995 with her solo exhibition *Frontage*. In her new works, she responded to the spatial and contextual situation of the gallery. The title alludes to the lines on the pavement whose length and visibility determine the value of a respective property. Parallel to the window, Koether created a wall in the gallery on which she mounted the main picture of the exhibition. The dimensions of the
81 painting *Frontage (Well, show me Nothing)* echo the proportions of the window and demonstrate the commodity character of the artwork (an exchange of money is taking place in the upper right). Moreover, the window itself is a motif, rendered visible by a stone thrown so that it leaves the outline of a star in the broken glass. It identifies what Koether describes as "activist viewing" ("*tätliche Anschauung*")—that moment of breaking through the barrier where imagination and reality, image and act, inside and outside converge: *Kissing the Canvas*.[31] In this respect, Koether resists the simplistic contrast between painting and contextual art that defined advanced art criticism in the early 1990s. Her exhibition reclaims the right of painting to participate.[32]

Rotten Suns

In the first half of the 1990s, Koether's painting took on an exuberant new dynamic. On the basis of her red paintings, she established an arabesque approach to painting, through which, step by step, she integrated social issues and historiographical traditions into her tableaux, ranging from the global sound of her *100% Malerei* and *Massen* pictures to her exploration of Abstract Expressionism in *Inside Job* to her technoid surfaces in *Affective Import* and site-specific contextualization of painting in *Frontage*. Unlike in Cologne, Koether was recognized in New York as a painter. Roberta Smith described her as "one of several women helping to breathe new life into painting."[33] This conceptual change sweeping though Cologne and other European cities at the time altered the pulse and pace of exhibitions held there. At first this seemed to coincide with a wave of commercial success for the artists involved. Yet their high hopes were soon to be dashed. Of all the works shown in the *Frontage* exhibition, not one single piece was sold. As a result, by the mid-1990s, Koether could no longer afford to rent a permanent studio.

This was one of the reasons why Koether concentrated, in her next exhibition at Pat Hearn in 1996, on a selection of the small-format drawings she had been creating in New York since 1990. The title of the exhibition was *after shows*, indicating a pause, a retrospective gaze, and, as such, a hiatus that would introduce an important shift in Koether's own visual approach. In comparison with the teeming compositions of her *Antibodies*, the images in Koether's subsequent 1997 exhibition, *songs of new york &c*, are more straightforward and clearly illuminated. The emptiness of the primed canvas is given its own space, on which the lines run almost weightlessly between expressive painting, drawing, and writing. Thematically, too, the images enter new territory. There are portrayals of the deserted cosmos and postapocalyptic landscapes, all far from the urban hustle and bustle of *Antibodies*. In this exhibition, Koether stages a meeting of three WBs—William Blake, Walter Benjamin, and 104, 107
William S. Burroughs—and takes the encounter as an opportunity to redefine the relationship between text and image. That begins with the facture of the pictures themselves. For *WB IV* 105
(Walter Benjamin) (1997) she uses a black-primed canvas as a blackboard. She then processes this dark layer with gold and silver rollerball pens, of the kind that only became widely available in the mid-1990s. The hard point of the pen acts like a needle, engraving the finest and most delicate of lines onto the picture plane, glistening in metallic hues. Exquisitely drawn loops, waves, and hatching converge in a diagram of dynamic energy lines bundled into a kind of raveled knot at the upper midpoint of the picture. The lines radiating outward from this heteronomous center form countless little kairoi, coincidences, and chance occurrences. Koether subtly alternates between the visual worlds of scientific diagrams and cartoon drawings, between *dessin automatique* and the imaginings of some *outer space*. These layers, in turn, are suffused with spiraling and wave-like structures redolent of images depicting the magnetic fields of solar eruptions. Between the lines there lies the inkling of a text, in the form of fragments, dissected into elementary parts, of a sentence from Walter Benjamin's treatise on Surrealism: "[Life seemed worth living only where] the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away"[34] The syntactic disorganization of the sentence within the image is akin to the organization of a



Jutta Koether, *Antibody I (First Moment after Noon: Night)*, 1993. Oil on canvas, 95 × 74 inches (241 × 188 cm)

Jutta Koether, *Untitled*, 1999. Mixed media on tracing paper, each: 11½ x 8³⁄₁₆ inches (29.5 x 20.7 cm). From artist's book *taxi*, 1999

dream that seems fully convincing to the dreamer, even though it may subsequently appear to be completely inconsistent. It was in this discrepancy—or rather, in its dissolution at the moment of waking—that Benjamin pinpointed the concept of "profane illumination," which states that the purportedly darker layers of consciousness—dream, intoxication, subconscious—are potentially liberating, rather than a "withdrawal into the self."

The sun quite literally took center stage in Koether's last exhibition at Pat Hearn: *sun//ny* (1999). Three large paintings dominated the room in a vibrant chord of black, red, and yellow, while the expressive impact of *August Aloud*, *Must be*, and *Foolish Fire* (all 1999) resulted to a large extent from the performative spontaneity of the painterly act. With a broad brush, the thick, oozing acrylic paint was swept across the canvas and further processed with spray cans and chalk. Into this formlessness Koether weaves a web of references ranging from Bataille to the baroque philosopher Robert Fludd; from the musician Sun Ra to the journalist Kodwo Eshun. In doing so, she conjures stances that evoke various forms of ecstasy as boundary-breaking forces. In this schema oneness can be achieved only via the destabilizing state of being outside the self. *August Aloud*, for instance, shows a rupturing sun-head in profile, from which two hearts are catapulted.[35] The fissure opens into a scream, the jagged lines radiate hysterically in all directions. On the upper edge are the phrases "the brain is a population" and "more brilliant than the sun": it is the depth of the blackness that illuminates the image.[36] The radiant darkness of *August Aloud* finds its counterpoint in the putrid yellow explosion of *Foolish Fire*. Here, a very different sun shines. Neither black nor almost invisible, it is a face morphed into a monumental double loop, from the center of which the paint gushes over the canvas and—much in the spirit of Bataille's concept of formlessness—permeates all form and order with its excretory abjection. It is this lurid contrast between illumination and defilement, ecstasy and lament, that Koehler has expressed in two drawings: on the right, the radiance of the sun, and on the left a self-portrait of the artist, whose sulphurous yellow excretion pours onto the earth.[37]

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Hearn, who was already very ill by the time the *sun//ny* exhibition opened, died in August 2000. With that, Koether lost not only a close friend but also her gallerist. At the turn of the decade she thus returned to what she would later describe as a "ground zero situation." There is a hint of this in the loosely hung canvases in the *sun//ny* exhibition. The canvases were no longer spanned on stretchers and could therefore be rolled up and transported anytime, becoming placeless. This in itself points toward the coming years, in which Koether would go on to focus increasingly on performative, collaborative projects. Against this backdrop, *sun//ny* can be seen as a kind of finale, or as a passing revue of the entire dynamics of the 1990s. The exploding sun of *August Aloud* recalls the facial globe of *ganz* and the shattered glass pane of *Frontage*, whose star also gazes at us like a face. And *Foolish Fire* spans an arc that takes us back to the *Starry Night* paintings, in which Koether's forms are blasted from some hellish inner space into the cosmos. From outer space the gaze returns to *Starry Night*, as though we were observing the volcano of the cypress trees at the moment of eruption. On one wall of the gallery, there was a row of small round pictures that Koether dedicated to people who were important to her: Tom Verlaine, Kim Gordon, Daniel Buchholz, Bennett Simpson, Pat Hearn, Colin de Land, and others [ill. p. 152]. The path to these pictures from the *Starry Nights* of the late 1980s is not a long one, yet the round, organic forms are no longer projectiles fired from hell. They have become unique stars, changing constellations, and fields of energy.

NOTES

1. Georges Bataille, "Rotten Sun," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 57–58; "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh," in *Visions of Excess*, 61–72. Antonin Artaud, "Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society," trans. Mary Beach and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, in *The Antonin Artaud Anthology*, ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965), 135–163.
2. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 204.
3. Jutta Koether, *20 Minuten: Aufzeichnung / Recording* (Cologne: Galerie Monika Sprüth, 1989). Cf. Jutta Koehter, "Hölle," in *Eau de Cologne 3* (Cologne" Galerie Monika Sprüth, 1989), 56–61.
4. In her 1987 book *f.*, Koether writes, "I make light in the space and as I do so I operate and become hysterical. Lots of people often say I am hysterical and pathetic, which would distort the gaze, but I know the circumstances in which hysteria is necessary." Jutta Koether, *f.* (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1987), 12–13.
5. The title of this work is a reference to Hegel's formulation of the "absolute unrest of Becoming" ("*absolute Unruhe des Werdens*") in his 1812–16 work *Wissenschaft der Logik* (*Science of Logic*). See G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 545.
6. In a remarkable analogy to Koether's *Starry Night*, Meyer Schapiro discerns, in the dramatic constellation of the celestial wave and stars, "a possible unconscious reminiscence of the apocalyptic theme of the woman in pain of birth, girded with the sun and the moon and crowned with the stars." Meyer Schapiro, "On a Painting of van Gogh: Crows in the Wheatfield" (1950) in Schapiro, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 87–99, this quote 97.
7. Cf. Jutta Koether, "3rd-Generation-Women Fem-Trash-Manifest" in *Eau de Cologne 3*, 57.
8. In conversation with Jutta Koether, summer 2017.
9. Cf. Jutta Koether, "Kissing The Canvas," *Texte zur Kunst*, Autumn 1990, 41–44. Translated here from the German. The text of the lecture-performance constitutes a further version of this painterly manifesto.
10. Jutta Koether, "Kissing The Canvas," 42. Particularly against the backdrop of her activity as a pop critic, Koether clearly states that she does not want her involvement with pop to be misconstrued as populism in the sense of "affably reaching out" between high and low art. What Koether demands is a deliberate ambiguity that can be understood as a method reminiscent of the pop analysis by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: i.e., a discourse that resists the prevailing language but does not provide an alternative—feminist or subcultural—anticanon to the existing and prevailing canon, which would merely shift the signifiers of the existing order and swap them between center and periphery. Instead, she seeks to "transpose the majority language into a minority-Becoming of all its dimensions and elements," as outlined in

Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987), 106. See also Tom Holert, "'Dispell them'. Anti-Pop und Pop-Philosophie: Ist eine andere Politik des Populären möglich?" ('Dispell them'. Anti-Pop and Pop-Philosophy: Is a Different Politics of the Popular possible?) In *Deleuze und die Künste*, ed. Peter Gente and Peter Weibel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007), 168–89.

11. Regarding the compositional figure of the arabesque, see Günter Oesterle, "Arabeske," in Ästhetische Grundbegriffe, vol. 1, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2000), 49–103.

12. In the CD project *The Halal File*, conceived as a commentary on her painting, Koether explored the "global sound" of urban life in New York and Paris. Cf. Jutta Koether, "Halal," in *Jutta Koether. The Halal File*, CD insert, n.p. (Hans Nieswandt, "The Halal File," in *Jutta Koether. The Halal File*, cover text).

13. The concept of the image as the refuse bin of cultural waste has parallels in Martin Kippenberger's installation *Heavy Burschi* (1989–90), which he created for an exhibition in the Kölnischer Kunstverein. He got his assistant Merlin Carpenter to produce paintings featuring Kippenberger's own motifs, which were then kicked and stamped on and thrown into a wooden container.

14. Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" (1948) in Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 154–63.

15. Visitors found themselves in the awkward position of being voyeurs or even spies by peering into the private sphere of the artist. In an entry dated May 2–4, 1992, Koether wrote of the "situation of actually sneaking in in somebody's private life … that double-meaning of privacy, the possibility of being a real intruder, not just a voyeur, is all laid out there." *J.K.: The Inside Job*, (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1993)

16. Cf. ibid.

17. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters" in Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New*, (New York: Horizon Press, 1959), 23–39; this quote 25. Originally published in *Art News*, New York, December 11, 1952, 22ff.

18. The exhibition took place from April 4 to May 26, 1992. *The one One* was later renamed *The Inside Job*.

19. In an entry dated May 4–5, 1992, Koether writes, "I really should have made my kneeling visible, kneeling while working on the painting, kneeling while reading." And on May 22 she writes, "We had a whole thing going on about how it is to paint on the floor all that blending and stretching and uncomfortableness of the position. He tried it too. And do not mind that old Pollock has done it, he said, he had it form the sand-painting-techniques of the Indians. So talking about appropriation of method." Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.

20. Entry dated May 17, 1992. Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p. The kneeling female nude is adopted from a motif by Pierre Klossowski, which also appears in the painting *völlig* (1991) in the exhibition *100% Malerei. Niemand ist eine Frau*.

21. The dancer is also a reference to Jackson Pollock's performative approach to painting documented in photographs by Hans Namuth. In some of Koether's early 1990s works, there are also motif allusions to Pollock, as in *Untitled* (1992), in which Pollock's hand and paintbrush can be seen jutting into the painting while painting a Madonna portrait. However, Koether deliberately eschewed the drip technique, holding instead to a slow and detailed process of painting more akin to that of Lee Krasner or Joan Mitchell.

22. In the final entry of her notes, written on May 21, 1992, Koether recalls her conversation with a visitor who asked whether she had ever thought of lying down to sleep on the painting: "It's funny, I had thought of that sometimes, but it had not been dry enough to do so … might try to rest on it the day before I will take it out here." Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p.

23. Jutta Koether, "Introduction," Koether, *J.K.: The Inside Job*, n.p. The title *The one One* references Slavoj Žižek's book *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), in which Žižek reflects on Hegelian dialectics and the concept of oneness, concerning the relationship of the One and the Other. As Žižek writes on page 52, "The correlate of the One cannot be the Other, cannot be something else, because the One is already the unity, reflected in itself with its other–it is the thing itself as its own other, for which the thing is, is itself–as a One … its ideal unity." Koether made copies of this chapter and distributed them to visitors to take away with them.

24. In her text "Deliratio III – So frei," published in *SPEX* magazine in 1995, Koether writes, "It fueled all the more a desire to concentrate on the multipart, the undone, the unconceptual, the unplannable. Manoeuvres of rupture and degeneration, the kick, the unexpected gift of the non-spectacle. Define, then destabilize. Dream of it at the very moment when it is far too bright, on going to sleep. Let uncontrollable everyday things happen in spates." ("Um so mehr schürte es den Wunsch, die Konzentration auf Vielteiliges, Ungetanes, Unkonzeptuelles, Unplanbares zu legen. Zerplatzungs- und Überbordungsmanöver, der Kick, das Überraschungsgeschenk des De-spektakels. Definieren, dann destabilisieren. Gerade dann davon träumen, wenn es viel zu hell ist, beim Schlafengehen. Unkontrollierbare alltägliche Dinge zu Hauf geschehen lassen.") She goes on to say, "And all around, time and again, a thousand times, techno. Oil on canvas as sound on sound. Application of painting. Boomboomboom … trip-hopping until the green rainbow would appear there. I believed in that magic." ("Und drumherum immer wieder und tausendmal Techno. Öl auf Leinwand als Sound auf Sound. Anwendung von Malerei. Bumbumbum … triphopping, bis daß der grüne Regenbogen erschien. Ich glaubte auch an diesen Zauber.") Jutta Koether, "Deliratio III – So frei," *SPEX*, October 1995, 61.

25. This is a reference to Jack Burnham's essay "Duchamp's Bride Stripped Bare," *Arts Magazine*, March 1972, 28–32, April 1972, 41–45, and May 1972, 58–61.

26. Jutta Koether, "Vorwort" (Foreword) in Jutta Koether, *Kairos. Texte zu Kunst und Musik* (Berlin and Amsterdam: Edition ID-Archiv, 1996), 8.

27. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 545.

28. Modernist painting, according to Michael Fried, "has no duration–not because one in fact experiences a picture by Noland or Olitski or a sculpture by David Smith or Caro in no time at all, but because at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest…. A single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it." Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998), 167. See also Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Suddenness: On the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance*, trans. Ruth Crowley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

29. Jutta Koether, "Vorwort," in *Kairos*, 9.

30. Koether, "Kissing The Canvas," 42.

31. "How does viewing become what I call 'activist viewing'?" (translated here from the German: "Wie wird aus Anschauung das, was ich ‚tätliche Anschauung' nenne?") This would have to be "heightened, along with socially intensive means created that go beyond discursivity." ("gesteigert werden, als auch sozial intensive Mittel hergestellt werden, die über Diskursivität hinausgehen.") Jutta Koether, "'You're just a piece of action'. Im Interesse der Unsicherheit" (1993), in Koether, *Kairos*, 38.

32. Koether has countered the formation of opposition to critical interventionist praxis and painting with her program of "social painting," which is directed against the perception of her purported autonomy. "It exists in a thoroughly complicit relationship with both its counterparts, in an imagined matrix of discursivity and sociality, which painting usually meets with silence and solitariness, as long as it is merely being produced … I have endeavored in various projects to trace the existential conditions of this game" (translated here from the German: "Sie existiert in einem geradezu absurden Komplizenverhältnis zu ihren beiden Gegenübers in einer gedachten Matrix: Diskursivität und Sozialität, denen die Malerei normalerweise Schweigen und Einsamkeit entgegensetzt, solange sie nur hergestellt wird.

[...] In verschiedenen Projekten habe ich versucht dieser Existenzbedingung des Spiel nachzuspüren"). Koether, "Weiterspielen: Ein Symposium führt zum nächsten Symposium" (Keeping the Game Going: One Symposium Leads to the Next Symposium), in *Spielverderber*, ed. Elisabeth Fiedler (Graz: Forum Stadtpark, 1994), 242.

33. Roberta Smith, "Art in Review," *New York Times*, February 24, 1995, http://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/24/arts/art-in-review-516695.html.

34. Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" in Michael W. Jennings (ed.), *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 207–221; this quote 208. German original: "Das Leben schien nur lebenswert, wo die Schwelle, die zwischen Wachen und Schlaf ist, in jedem ausgetreten war …," in Walter Benjamin, "Der Sürrealismus. Die letzte Momentaufnahme der europäischen Intelligenz," in ed. Benjamin, *Aufsätze. Essays. Vorträge. Gesammelte Schriften, Band II, 1*, 295–310, this quote 296.

35. The motif of the sun with two hearts in *August Aloud* references an engraving from Robert Fludd's book *Philosophia sacra et vere Christiana, seu meteorologia cosmica*, published in Frankfurt in 1626.

36. *More Brilliant Than the Sun* is the title of a book by Kodwo Eshun, published in 1998, charting the history of Afro-futuristic music from Sun Ra and Alice Coltrane through to current emerging trends in hip-hop and techno. Cf. Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1998). Eshun uses the phrase "The brain is a population" as a subheader in his book (page 53), which is in fact a quote from Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 64.

37. In his contribution "Informe" (Formless), published in the "critical dictionary" section of the journal *Documents* in December 1929, Bataille writes, "On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit." Georges Bataille, "Formless," trans. Allan Stoekl, in *Visions of Excess*, 31 ("Par contre affirmer que l'univers ne ressemble à rien et n'est qu'informe revient à dire que l'univers est quelque chose comme une araignée ou un crachat"). Georges Bataille, "Informe" *Documents* 7, December 1929, 382. In his contribution "Spittle" ("L'eau à la bouche") in the same publication, Michel Leiris adds: "Spit, because it is runny, shapeless, of no precise colour, and wet, is finally the very symbol of the formless, the unverifiable, the unhierarchical," in a translation by Dominic Faccini in *October*, no. 30, Spring 1992, 30 ("Le crachat est enfin, par son inconsistance, ses contours indéfinis, l'imprécision relative de sa couleur, son humidité, le symbole même de l'informe, de l'invérifiable, du non-hiérarchisé").

BLACK DEATH

Branden W. Joseph

Performance by Electrophilia as part of the exhibition *Black Bonds / Jutta Koether & Steven Parrino*, Swiss Institute, New York, November 12, 2002

I first encountered Jutta Koether's work in the "flesh" (the metaphor is hers) at a concert by Japanese noise musician Merzbow (Masami Akita), which took place on December 6, 2002, as the third performance in *Black Bonds*, the exhibition that she and Steven Parrino mounted at the Swiss Institute in New York.[1] I vividly recall the packed crowd within the loftlike space, beer cans already well distributed throughout, and, after a slow buildup, the nearly vaporizing impact of the initial blast of noise. The intense volume and chaotic irregularity of Akita's sound waves transformed the sense of one's body into that of a paper-thin acoustical membrane.

The premise of the exhibition involved Koether and Parrino each reclaiming a number of their own "failed paintings." "Maybe the color wasn't right, or they were fucked-up in some way (physically, ideologically, or by situation)," explained Parrino. "Our solution was to save them by blacking them out, canceling the image/object. A positive/negative, deconstruct to reconstruct, chaos to order to chaos …"[2] As installed, Parrino's cutout, twisted, and otherwise misshapen black monochromes tended to slump halfway onto the floor, while Koether's more gesturally overpainted black-on-black canvases presided higher up on the gallery's walls. Visually distinct, but speaking to each other by means of their shared (non)coloration, the artistic pair's images formed what the press release termed "a conceptually destructed environment."[3]

Both artists had previously explored the results of a predominantly black palette. In the late 1990s, Koether made such works
105 as *WB III (Walter Benjamin)* and *WB IV (Walter Benjamin)* (both 1997), where subtle yet aggressive traces of ballpoint pen and metallic ink on black gesso and oil resemble hastily scrawled
104,107 graffiti on a chalkboard. (Other, more colorful "WB" works of the same year were dedicated to William Blake and William S. Burroughs.) Soon after Koether and Parrino started collaborating in 1999, she exhibited *Ladies of the Rope* (2000), an appropriated Prada lookbook blackened out with acrylic and ink, alongside related canvases such as *Blink (Hommage to Kim Gordon)* and *Eating the Eye (study)* (both 2000), in which thread and long strands of yarn, reminiscent of the cords dangling from some of Eva Hesse's early relief paintings, protrude from sketchily outlined female countenances. A year later, Koether began work on the thirteen-part "Volume" series paintings, where she overlaid abstract, ethereal fields of gestural black brushstrokes with various markings—from simple patterns to words to near-scribbles—in metallic pen. The large *X*'s "crossing out" the compositions of *Volume 3* and *Volume 9* (both 2001/2002) echo the canceling operation implemented in *Black Bonds* (a procedure continued
122 in certain crossed-out motifs of *Fresh Aufhebung* [2004]).

Although Koether and Parrino had met several times before, their artistic relationship began only after they realized their parallel explorations of black. "We discovered," Koether recalled, "that we had both been working on developing a kind of 'black system,' where life forces, existential and aesthetic matters, and a joyous nihilism had arrived in our lives and manifested themselves in our art. We instantly recognized that as a starting point for something."[4] In *Black Bonds*, the blacked-out paintings (which, having started out black in many cases, were sometimes doubly blackened) served both as autonomously exhibited works and as backdrop, stage set, and/or soundproofing for the performances by Merzbow, Christian Marclay, Foot (Thurston Moore, Don Fleming, and Jim Dunbar), Black Dice, and Koether and Parrino's own Electrophilia.[5] Parrino had already begun performing under the name Electrophilia when Koether joined him, she taking over his Roland analog modeling synthesizer while he moved to bass guitar. Parrino's earlier recordings frequently gestured toward New York's No Wave bands (Parrino "covered" both DNA's "Blonde Red Head" and Mars's "Helen Fordsdale"), which retained a modicum of song structure, however stripped down.[6] During the Koether era, however, Electrophilia increasingly gravitated toward more massive slabs of electronic feedback and amplified fuzz, an attempt not so much to "carve out space with sound" (as Koether and Bob Nickas wrote about the proto-grunge band the Melvins, to whom she dedicated several paintings), but, at its most intense, to squeeze the atmosphere completely out of the room.[7]

As captured on the double LP *Black Noise Practitioner* (2004), Electrophilia's sound weaves in and out of extreme noise, alternating between grinding blasts of jet-engine-like din and a swirling organ somewhat reminiscent of brooding, B-grade horror soundtracks.[8] The latter moments (aided, on one cut, by Lizzi Bougatsos's echoing wail) call to mind Bobby Beausoleil's grandiosely gloomy score for Kenneth Anger's film *Lucifer Rising* (1972). At the time, Anger was a mutual interest of both Koether's and Parrino's. Parrino's film installation *Necropolis (The Lucifer Crank) for Anger* (2004; with Amy Granat and Larry 7) coupled footage of a hooded, skull-masked figure with the pulsating acoustical static created by a roughly edited strip of 16-mm celluloid run across the projector's optical sound reader and broadcast at thunderous volume through a Marshall amp. In the same year, Koether produced a series of paintings dedicated to Anger, including a trio of predominantly black canvases each
123 entitled *Unganzheitsymbole: K (Hommage an Kenneth Anger)* (2004). Featuring a prominent capital letter *K* formed out of white dots that resemble the studs on the black leather jacket used to spell out the title of Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963), the paintings clearly reference the filmmaker. At the same time, however, the "K" cannot but also refer to its painter, thus forming an alphabetic palimpsest in which one identity merges with another. In its isolation, the single letter additionally calls to mind Franz Kafka's fictional protagonist K.

Throughout Kafka's novels *The Trial* and *The Castle*, K. reveals himself to be a profoundly unstable character, one who subtly but insistently changes attitudes, attributes, and abilities from one chapter to the next. As described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, K.'s subjectivity metamorphoses according to the different assemblages (fortress, courthouse, the painter Titorelli's studio, and so on) that he encounters and, willingly or

Kenneth Anger, *Scorpio Rising*, 1963. Film still

unwillingly, infiltrates. "Ultimately," they write, "it is less a question of K as a general function taken up by an individual than of K as a *functioning of a polyvalent assemblage of which the solitary individual is only a part*, the coming collectivity being another part, another piece of the machine—without our knowing yet what this assemblage will be."[9]

In both the lack of stable subject position and the engagement with collective social practices (and pressures), K. serves as an apt comparison with Koether, who has described the "artist-subject" as one who "must likewise not be closed and is exposed to the power of certain social conditions … a plural being that is entangled in all sorts of things."[10] From this perspective, K. also resembles certain of Koether's most significant artistic models, including Martin Kippenberger (another "K"), whose "alter-egos and multiple characters … demonstrated his refusal to be limited to one type of persona"; Sigmar Polke, who "stood for disorder … ambivalence, [and] the project of self-differentiation"; and even Marsden Hartley, "someone who really didn't have an artistic identity, or if there is one it's just a weird bundle, that keeps constructing itself."[11] Partially through her own collaborative and collective endeavors, Koether aims to produce a complex, multivalent, and provisionally defined artistic practice that remains open in the face of the social, political, and economic pressures to forge a single "branded type of identity."[12] Arising out of her larger collaborative engagement with Parrino, *Black Bonds* served as a particularly significant moment in Koether's attempt "to let painting run into and/or make it part of a collective practice and thru that alter the practice as well as re-set form."[13]

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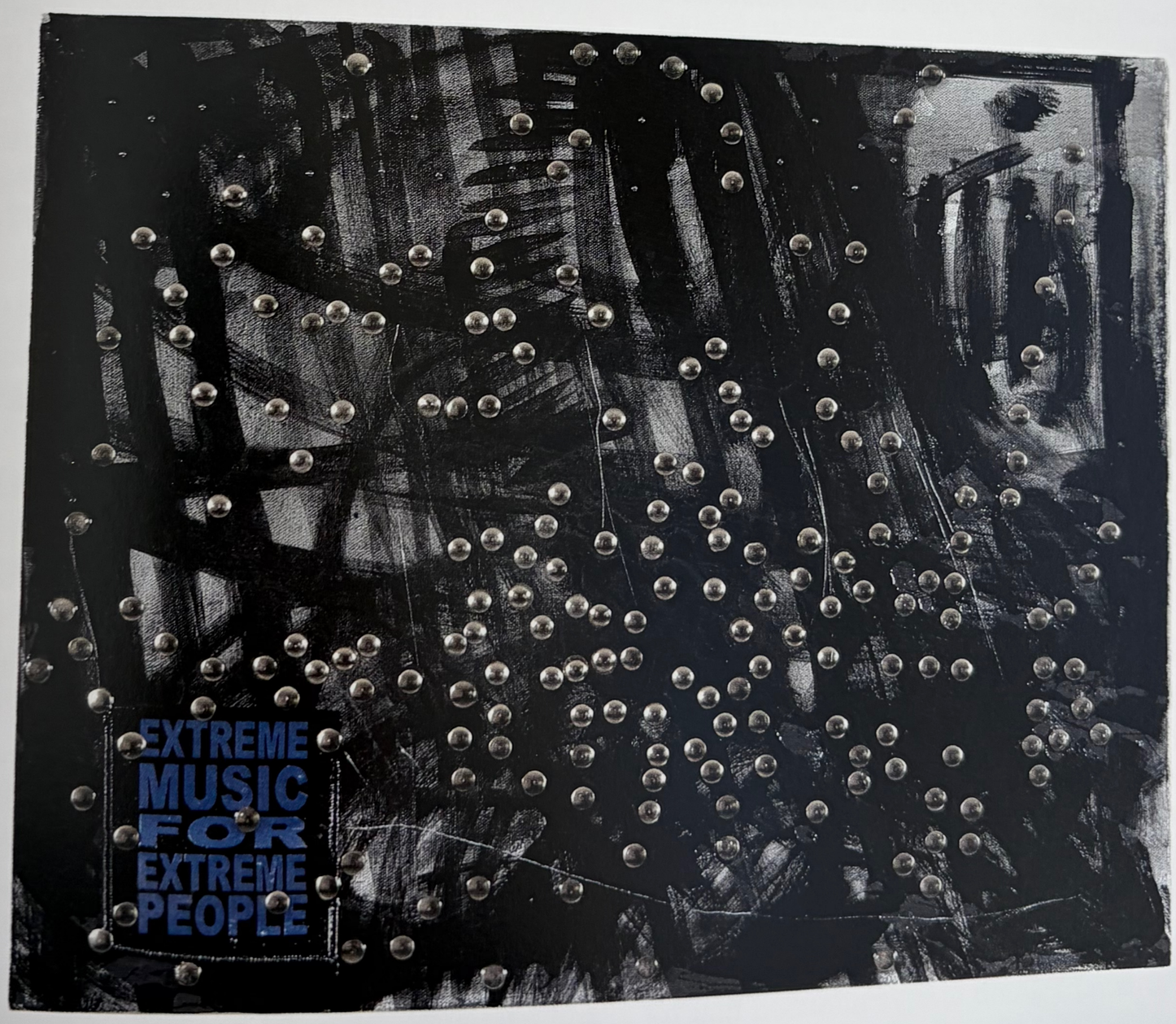
Electrophilia was far from Koether's first engagement with popular music. Before moving to New York in the early 1990s, she served as an editor and copublisher of the Cologne-based magazine *SPEX*, which played a pivotal role in connecting and critically interrogating the fields of contemporary art and music. Some of Koether's first works of visual art took the form of punk fanzine–like collage collaborations with Thomas Giörtz, distributed primarily at music concerts and record shops. ("I did lyric translations for Patty [*sic*] Smith and the Buzzcocks. We pasted them together with photos and stuff and sold them for one mark.")[14] Koether has always been clear about the role punk played in her artistic formation. "Popular music cultures, subcultural ideas, and the whole do-it-yourself or DIY aspect of early punk and proto-punk culture were appealing to me because they represented an alternative trajectory to that of the academy," she observed to Kim Gordon. "Although I knew I wanted to be an artist, there was no door I knew how to open…. At that time, music, music culture, writing about music, and the developments represented by or emerging out of early punk helped me establish this other cultural sphere."[15] The nascent punk scene, as she explained further to Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, also complemented her feminist interests: "The other element that was critical for my formation was the anarchist motto of punk culture: Do it yourself. Whatever it is that you do, you are in charge, you are a member of a community—and equally. Men, women—they all looked the same for a certain moment."[16] Pointing to such female role models as the Slits, Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex, and *New Musical Express* writer Julie Burchill, she continued, "I don't want to idealize, but at the emergence of punk, men and women were equally active."[17]

Prior to joining Electrophilia, Koether had released an LP with Rita Ackermann as the synth-voice duo Diadal, occasionally joined by members of No-Neck Blues Band.[18] She has also collaborated with Moore, Gordon (frequently), and Tom Verlaine, and formed the ensemble XXX Macarena with artists and musicians Tony Conrad and John Miller (with occasional appearances by Mike Kelley or Greg Parma Smith).[19] Yet despite her intimacy with a wide range of musical forms, Koether has always approached them with a degree of distance. Being from Germany, as she explained to Kelley, she felt that the music that most intrigued her was foreign. "If you get interested in pop culture," she declared, "that's again second order, in that it is an alien pop culture. It's imported from America. It's the other pop culture. You can't really totally enter it."[20] Accordingly, Koether has always understood popular music, including the most outwardly "genuine" strains of rock and roll, as thoroughly constructed. As she learned during her time at *SPEX*, "Rock culture stood for the 'authentic.' I was always in the Rock camp, because of my attitudes and taste. And yet, since I was always confronted with the market and the laws governing such productions, I was also completely familiar with the fact that everything authentic is inauthentic at the same time."[21] That being the case, Koether has consistently engaged with music cultures, no matter how sincere, as available for appropriation, reformulation, and exaggeration. In perhaps her earliest performative invocation of music, in 1985 or '86, she deployed an acoustic guitar more "like a symbol" than an instrument.[22] As she noted in a different context, "To help oneself to signs which are familiar (adapted and exaggerated); one adopts them and simultaneously distances oneself."[23]



Top: Electrophilia, *Black Noise Practitioner*, Skul 04, 2004, 2xLP
Bottom: Jutta Koether, *Extreme Music: Black Metal*, 2009. Acrylic on canvas, thumbtacks, patch, 16 × 20 inches (40.6 × 50.8 cm)

Installation view, *Black Bonds / Jutta Koether & Steven Parrino*, Swiss Institute, New York, 2002–2003

Yet Koether's work—whether in music, painting, or performance—seldom simply exposes culture as constructed, leaving her appropriated materials in a state of evident inauthenticity. However complexly heterogeneous, her aesthetic is not one of postmodern pastiche.[24] Rather, she seeks to turn the screw one more time and release or achieve an effect of authenticity via inauthenticity itself. The seemingly paradoxical dynamic of what she has called "artificial authenticity" may be understood as a corollary of the situation enacted in a typical rock concert.[25] As Gordon presciently analyzed in the essay "I'm Really Scared When I Kill in My Dreams," heroic rock stars such as Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Sid Vicious, or Darby Crash engaged dialectically with their manufactured images, "in some cases believing in their media-created image and in others shaping the image themselves, whether or not they believed it—they used that image to destroy, within their own framework, the standard of what had gone before, giving rise to new forms. The audience paid to see them do this, as well as to witness the destruction of the artists' own lives—the illusory freedom becoming an actual freedom."[26] Such a process, in which the willful enactment of illusion produces real effects, proves analogous to the manner in which Koether characterizes her own performance aesthetic: "Even when I use a particular form, for example an excessive form of poetic threshold, it must definitely be made clear that it is something staged. Which, by yielding itself to this moment, can release certain things."[27]

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In addition to a mutual engagement with the color black, Koether and Parrino shared an interest in the thematics of death. (Indeed, they dedicated *Black Bonds* to George Grosz's 1918 skull-headed figure *Dada Death*.) Parrino always stressed that he had adopted painting after the historical moment of its supposed demise, whether that demise was attributed to Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1914–15), Jackson Pollock's apocalyptic abstraction, Frank Stella's black paintings, Andy Warhol's "Death and Disaster" silkscreens, or postmodern academic discourse (of which he was skeptical).[28] "When I started making paintings," Parrino explains in a passage approvingly cited by Koether, "the word on painting was PAINTING IS DEAD." Yet, he continued, "death can be refreshing, so I started engaging in necrophilia … approaching history in the same way that Dr. Frankenstein approaches body parts … 'Nature Morte' … a kind of post-punk existentialism."[29]

Koether has dated her own confrontation with the postmodern "death of painting" discourse to her time at the Whitney Independent Study program in the 1990s. "As a painter" in a context saturated with post-Conceptual institutional critique, she recalls, "I guess I was not even considered an entertainer, but rather a zombie, a ghost from some other time."[30] In actuality, however, Koether's interrelation of death and painting predated her relocation to New York, appearing in both of her Cologne-era publications *f.* (1987) and *20 Minuten: Aufzeichnung / Recording* (1989). In *f.*, she characterizes "the successions of paintings and disputes over paintings that break each other's necks … and yet, despite the carnage, win a new life" as "multiplied reiterations of death."[31] Similarly, amid the manifold references to dying that permeate *20 Minuten*, she expresses pride in being able to "repeat death." "Death," she proclaims, "follows death."[32] Thus, already at the outset of her career, death figured as multiple, a moment of passage—not before rebirth, but before a subsequent moment of demise. "After death comes death," she announced to Diedrich Diederichsen in 1991. "That was the message of art, and it inspired the discovery of new techniques, which are known as the T.echniques O.f D.iscovery!"[33] Painting, according to Koether, is particularly beholden to such a twofold mortality. What is "dead already" (to cite the title of Koether and Gordon's 2007 collaborative exhibition at Reena Spaulings Fine Art) dies again and in the process unleashes new potentialities. "Now I start with my pieces of junk in the world with knowledge of hell," she asserts in *20 Minuten*. "Now all this makes the impossible possible: painting."[34]

Koether's doubly deceased—or what she sometimes calls "multi-morbid"—paintings cannot be understood as attempts to recuperate the supposed plenitude of artistic expression (which she has always regarded as "posing"), but rather only as partial or fragmentary components within larger ensembles consisting of artist, audience, installation, context, and history.[35] As in *Black Bonds*, where so-called failed canvases gained renewed purpose within a performative setting, "painting could become flyer, theatrical prop, site for theoretical detritus, music/painterly scores, a door, an amplifier for an emotion, a site for word play … or just a carrier for thought and emotion and bodily matter."[36] Koether's ability to activate a canvas and infiltrate it into surrounding social and informatic networks has been most influentially discussed by David Joselit in terms of "transitive" or "network" painting.[37] "Transitive painting," he argues, "invents forms and structures whose purpose is to demonstrate that once an object enters a network, it can never be fully stilled, but only subject to different

material states and speeds of circulation ranging from the geologically slow (cold storage) to the infinitely fast."[38]

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In some ways, the series of heavily collaged black paintings that Koether began in 2004 suggests Joselit's concern with differential velocities and materialities. Encrusted with a wide variety of matter—including tacks, studs, chains, patches, and other bits of cloth and paper—each canvas manifests an evident sense of process. Like the surfaces of Robert Rauschenberg's more agglutinated Combine paintings, to which they bear some resemblance, Koether's works open themselves to their outsides, whether physically, via reflections and transgressions of the picture plane, or thematically, through pictorial invocations of other realms of art and culture. (Those made after Parrino's untimely death by motorcycle accident in January 2005 frequently pay homage to his love of biker culture.) Koether's liberal use of liquid glass, however, renders both the gestural marks and the embedded materials frozen, entropically stilled like the landscapes described in J. G. Ballard's novel *The Crystal World* or the atmosphere evoked by Nico's chilling ballad "Frozen Borderline."[39]

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Bernadette Corporation's collectively authored novel *Reena Spaulings* (which Koether helped write and in which she appears briefly as a character) poses an implicit alternative to the notion of network painting for understanding the interactions between a painting's internal motifs, spectators, environments, and contexts. Referencing Édouard Manet's portrait of Victorine Meurent, *Young Lady in 1866* (1866), which hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where the fictional Reena Spaulings works as a guard, the novel's narrator describes the complex of Meurent, "the parrot, and the half-peeled grapefruit down in the bird gravel like a cracked open head" as "a precise life-form."[40] Refusing to rest inertly on the wall, Manet's figure interacts with Spaulings in various ways via invocations of smell, touch, taste ("you might wanna … lick the black boot"), sound, memory, historical associations, and even an intersubjective stare: "A painting something like a practicing ground: Learn to hold a gaze. To look at this painting is to experience a situation sensuously rich and extremely suggestive, yet not real at all. A special fiction to inhabit. Another kind of performance unfolding, making room for fantasies now, and narratives full of intimacies."[41]

In *Reena Spaulings*, "life-form" is the preferred rendition of "form-of-life," a term central to the thinking of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben and, more importantly for Bernadette Corporation, the radical French collective Tiqqun.[42] Whereas the idea of transitive painting emphasizes the manner in which paintings come to circulate within larger networks of sociability, information, and capital, the discourse around form-of-life points toward a certain opposition to the networks—or, more properly understood, apparatuses—through which contemporary operations of power flow. Following the insights of Michel Foucault, both Agamben and Tiqqun regard an apparatus as an ensemble of materials, institutions, and processes that ensnare an individual, channeling and attenuating his or her potentialities to produce a seemingly unified identity.[43] Approached from this perspective, the process of transitivity emerges as a central component of power's contemporary function. "If commodity imperialism still exists," argues Tiqqun, "it is above all as an imperialism of apparatuses that it makes itself felt; an imperialism that responds to a single necessity: the TRANSITIVE NORMALIZATION OF EVERY SITUATION. This entails increasing circulation *between* apparatuses, for circulation provides the best vector of universal traceability and the *order of flows*."[44]

Édouard Manet, *Young Lady in 1866*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 72⅞ × 50⅝ inches (185.1 × 128.6 cm)

To forge or feel one's existence as a form-of-life, on the other hand, entails resisting the smoothly interconnected functioning of apparatuses. As an example, Tiqqun point to illegalities such as shoplifting or riding public transportation without payment, modes of existence that contravene the normal operations of apparatuses and not only cause the brain to actively consider the circumstances, but also require the body to remain on high alert. "Not stealing," they explain, "provides a certain comfort. Not stealing means completely disappearing in the apparatus, means conforming to it in order to avoid the violence that underlies it: the violence between a body and the aggregate of employees, surveillance personnel, and, potentially, the police."[45] "Stealing," on the other hand, not only "compels me to *think my situation*," but also "compels me to a presence, to an attention, to expose my bodily surface to an extent that, on certain days, it is just too much for me."[46] "The *how* of 'theft,'" they continue, "has nothing to do with its apparent legal occurrence. The *how* is the *physical* awareness of space and environment, the *physical* awareness of the *apparatus*, to which theft drives me. It is the extreme attention of the body illicitly on the subway, alert to the slightest sign of ticket inspectors…. With crime there is a whole incandescence to the body, a transformation of the body into an ultrasensitive impact surface: that is its genuine

Jutta Koether, *622*, 2000. Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 118⅛ × 129¹⁵⁄₁₆ inches (300 × 330 cm)

experience."[47] It is in this state, outside of normalization within the apparatus, that one sets about "*establishing forms-of-life in their difference, intensifying, complicating relations between them, developing as subtly as possible civil war between us.*"[48]

Both aspects of Tiqqun's notion of form-of-life (nonconformity with the apparatus and pursuit of intersubjective intensity) prove relevant for understanding the wider stakes of Koether's artistic project. For if the gallery or museum can be understood as an apparatus that normalizes a particular regime of reception, Koether's performative and installational interventions must be seen as pursuing a function of resistance.[49] Like the thief or turnstile jumper, Koether does not disappear into the exhibitionary apparatus, but rather inhabits it in such a manner that all of its components become potential foci of heightened attention: from the walls (which she has sometimes rendered in glass), to the mounting brackets (which she has brought to the front of the canvas as "flesh corners"), to the spectators (whom she addresses and/or incorporates into her gallery performances), and so on. "For me," as she explained to Kim Gordon, "it has always been important to test these types of locations. What does it mean to fit something into a certain context? How can you, in a certain way, not fit? Or make the process of fitting in, itself, be felt by everybody in the room? How can you perform the awkwardness of being dislocated, of pushing one system into another?"[50] Here, awkward dislocation opposes the transitive normalization and flow of the well-functioning apparatus.

One way in which Koether accomplishes such an outcome (including in many of her performances with Gordon) is through awkward and potentially embarrassing displays of vulnerability. Isabelle Graw has described this effect particularly well: "Anyone who has witnessed one [of Koether's performances] will know what I mean when I say that the cringe factor is generally high."[51] Noting the fragmentary texts, lapidary actions (such as hitting the floor, brandishing a flashlight, or modestly playing the synthesizer), and, especially, "intonations suggesting an unmistakable pathos," Graw maintains: "As a spectator, you can't help being a bit embarrassed by the whole thing, because on some level Koether appears to be disclosing herself, inviting the audience to possess her authentic personhood. You wish you were somewhere else, and yet you remain transfixed."[52] As mentioned above (and as Graw fully comprehends), Koether's performance does not aim for unalloyed authenticity; indeed, the supposed authenticity of expressionist painting is what she seeks most to subvert. Rather, her goal is precisely to achieve a sense of embarrassment inasmuch as that feeling establishes a particular kind of intersubjective relation. Koether's awkwardness not only causes audience members to be intensely, even painfully aware of *her* actions, but also instills an uneasy form of self-awareness within and among *themselves*. Instead of inspiring the efficient circulation of images and information, Koether's actions induce an uncomfortable attentiveness and sense of physical implication on the viewer's part, which serves to slow, impede, or even temporarily extinguish the art gallery's normative operation.

Installation view, *New Yorker Fenster*, Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne, 2008

With Electrophilia, Koether and Parrino approached spectatorial self-awareness in a different manner: via the intensity of playing (and listening to) the potent volume of the acoustical environments they generated. To be within the maelstrom of their grinding feedback—dropping out from time to time, only to roar back seemingly louder—is to confront a certain underlying violence, as though being physically assaulted.[53] Parrino, as Koether recalled, "believed in establishing strict rules of playing together in which then-unheard intensities and extreme noise could occur. All this was done not as a 'band' but as a practice."[54] Conceived not primarily as a product (band, concert, release, etc., although such by-products were inevitably created) but as a "practice," Koether and Parrino's "noise sessions" instantiated a collaborative form-of-life by which to pursue aesthetic and subjective becoming—"where extremes are tried out, where existence is put at risk, where intensities are created, willingly, unwillingly."[55] To encounter such intensity does not, as the sometimes gushing writing about noise music might have one believe, completely evade social and aesthetic strictures, but nonetheless, by heightening the awareness of one's body and its proximity to others within the space, institutes a certain distance from the gallery's normative function and conditions of contemplative reception.[56] Experiencing the noise of an Electrophilia performance (or of the Merzbow concert at *Black Bonds*) is to feel one's body transformed into an "ultrasensitive impact surface" similar to that described by Tiqqun. This is where Koether and Parrino's "black system" of artistic production opens onto "life forces" and "existential … matters" beyond mere signification or style. As Koether would put it in *Black Noise*, the artist's book she dedicated to Parrino after his death, Electrophilia not only pointed to "NAKED SENSATION," but above all to "an experimental form of collective existence."[57]

NOTES

1. *Black Bonds* took place between November 12, 2002, and January 4, 2003. Merzbow's performance was released on CD with cover art by Koether and Parrino as *Live Magnetism*, Caminate Recordings 001, 2003. On "flesh," see Jutta Koether, "teaser's trail," *Ecstatic Peace Poetry Journal*, no. 3 (Winter 2001/2002): n.p.
2. Steven Parrino, *The No Texts (1979–2003)* (Jersey City, NJ: Abaton Book Company, 2003), 37; this text was also included on the invitation card for *Black Bonds*.
3. See "Black Bonds / Jutta Koether & Steven Parrino," Exhibition Archive, Swiss Institute, New York, accessed September 24, 2017, https://www.swissinstitute.net/2001-2006/Exhibitions/2002_Black_Bonds/blackbonds.htm
4. Jutta Koether and Bob Nickas, "Dark Star," *Artforum*, March 2005, 59.
5. Electrophilia's sets were partially released on the cassette *Jutta Koether w/ Steven Parrino*, Tapesports 3, 2005.
6. "Blond [*sic*] Red Head" appears on the 7-inch single *Electrophilia vs. LSD 25*, Villa Magica Records, 1998; "Helen Fordsdale" appears on the Electrophilia [Parrino solo] 10-inch EP *Shock Wave Troop*, Éditions Circuit, 2002. Although Koether and Parrino began playing together around 1999, the earliest released recording of their music dates to 2002.
7. Jutta Koether and Robert Nickas, "What Is This Thing Called Melvins?" *Artforum*, February 1994, 12.
8. Electrophilia, *Black Noise Practitioner*, Skul 04, 2004, two LPs.
9. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 85.
10. Koether in "Painting Abuse: A Conversation between Isabelle Graw and Jutta Koether," in *Jutta Koether: The Thirst*, ed. Iris Müller-Westermann, exh. cat. (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2011), 34.
11. Koether, "Jutta Koether on Martin Kippenberger," *Tate etc.*, Spring 2006, 36; Koether, "Bad Dad," in *Alibis: Sigmar Polke, 1963–2010*, ed. Kathy Halbreich, Mark Godfrey, Lanka Tattersall, and Magnus Schaefer, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 191; and Koether in "Great Expectations: Jutta Koether in Conversation with Sam Lewitt and Eileen Quinlan," in *Jutta Koether*, exh. cat. (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2006), 160. Another possible "K" reference would be Philip K. Dick, whom Koether quotes in *20 Minuten: Aufzeichnung / Recording* (Cologne: Galerie Monika Sprüth, 1989), n.p.: "I guess I have become multiple personalities and I like it that way."
12. Koether in Rhea Anastas, Gregg Bordowitz, Andrea Fraser, et al., "The Artist Is a Currency," *Grey Room*, no. 24 (Summer 2006): 115.
13. Koether in "Great Expectations," 157.
14. Koether in Mike Kelley, "Jutta Koether," in *Mike Kelley: Interviews, Conversations, and Chit-Chat (1986–2004)*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich and Dijon: JRP Ringier and Les Presses du réel, 2005), 112–13.
15. Kim Gordon and Jutta Koether, "Classic Conceptual-Art Trouble: Kim Gordon and Jutta Koether in Conversation," in Kim Gordon, *Is It My Body? Selected Texts*, ed. Branden W. Joseph (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 164.
16. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "A Conversation with Jutta Koether," *October*, no. 157 (Summer 2016): 18.
17. Buchloh, "A Conversation with Jutta Koether," 18.
18. Diadal, *Diadal*, Hot Cars Warp Records 7/8, 1998, 2xLP.
19. See XXX Macarena, *XXX Macarena*, Primary Information / From the Nursery, 2010, LP.
20. Koether in Kelley, "Jutta Koether," 97.
21. Koether in "Rita Vitorelli in Conversation with Jutta Koether," *Spike*, Autumn 2005, 75.
22. Gordon and Koether, "Classic Conceptual-Art Trouble," 155.
23. *koether: massen. malerei und versammlung*, ed. Sabine Breitweiser, exh. cat. (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1991), n.p.
24. Buchloh, "A Conversation with Jutta Koether," 15.
25. Koether, *The Halal File*, Standard Graphik, 1990, compact disc.
26. Gordon, *Is It My Body?*, 52. Cf. Koether's comments on "self-destruction" in *koether: massen*, n.p.
27. Koether in "Rita Vitorelli in Conversation with Jutta Koether," 77.
28. Parrino, *The No Texts*, 37; on "European/French simulation theories," 33.
29. Parrino, *The No Texts*, 43. Cf. Koether in Robert Storr, Tim Griffin, et al., "Thick and Thin: A Roundtable," *Artforum*, April 2003, 240.
30. Koether in Storr, Griffin, et al., "Thick and Thin," 178. Cf. Jacqueline Humphries's recollection of the low stature of painting at the Whitney Independent Study Program in Mark Godfrey, "Statements of Intent: On the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl," *Artforum*, May 2014, 296.
31. Jutta Koether, *f.* trans. Nick Mauss and Michael Sanchez (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 11.
32. Koether, *20 Minuten*, n.p.
33. *koether: massen*, n.p. T.O.D. is also an acronym for "time of death."
34. Koether, *20 Minuten*, n.p
35. Buchloh, "A Conversation with Jutta Koether," 30; Kelley, "Jutta Koether," 100.
36. Koether in "Great Expectations," 157.
37. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," *October*, no. 130 (Fall 2009): 125–34.
38. Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," 132.
39. On Nico's importance for Koether, see Buchloh, "A Conversation with Jutta Koether," 18–19.
40. Bernadette Corporation, *Reena Spaulings* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 32.
41. Bernadette Corporation, *Reena Spaulings*, 33–34.
42. Although "life-form" is preferred, "form-of-life" also appears as such; see Bernadette Corporation, *Reena Spaulings*, 18.
43. Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 11; Tiqqun, "A Critical Metaphysics Could Emerge as a Science of Apparatuses … ," in *This Is Not a Program*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 140. Koether cites the latter text in her essay "Mad Garland" in *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, ed. Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsch (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 80–94.
44. Tiqqun, "A Critical Metaphysics," 155–56.
45. Tiqqun, "A Critical Metaphysics," 156.
46. Tiqqun, "A Critical Metaphysics," 156.
47. Tiqqun, "A Critical Metaphysics," 180.
48. Tiqqun, "This Is Not a Program," in *This Is Not a Program*, 13.
49. On the museum as a disciplinary apparatus, see Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).
50. Gordon and Koether, "Classic Conceptual-Art Trouble," 162.
51. Isabelle Graw, "Peripheral Vision," *Artforum*, March 2006, 262.
52. Graw, "Peripheral Vision," 262.
53. See the description in Georg Gatsas, "Live Free or Die, Muthafucker," in *Born to Be Wild: Homage to Steven Parrino* (St. Gallen: Kunstmuseum St. Gallen; Nürnberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2009), 29.
54. Koether and Nickas, "Dark Star," 59.
55. Koether and Nickas, "Dark Star," 59; "Rita Vitorelli in Conversation with Jutta Koether," 78. Cf. Bernadette Corporation, *Reena Spaulings*, 17: "So a life-form is something between bodies, in every situation, and is always new each time. These inclinations are reciprocal and improvised and intense."
56. For a representative range of writing about noise music, see Mattin and Anthony Iles, eds., *Noise and Capitalism* (Donostia / San Sebastián: Kritika, 2009).
57. Jutta Koether, *Black Noise* (*Geneva: Ecart Publications, 2007*), n.p.

OPPOSITION AND SISTER SQUARES[1]

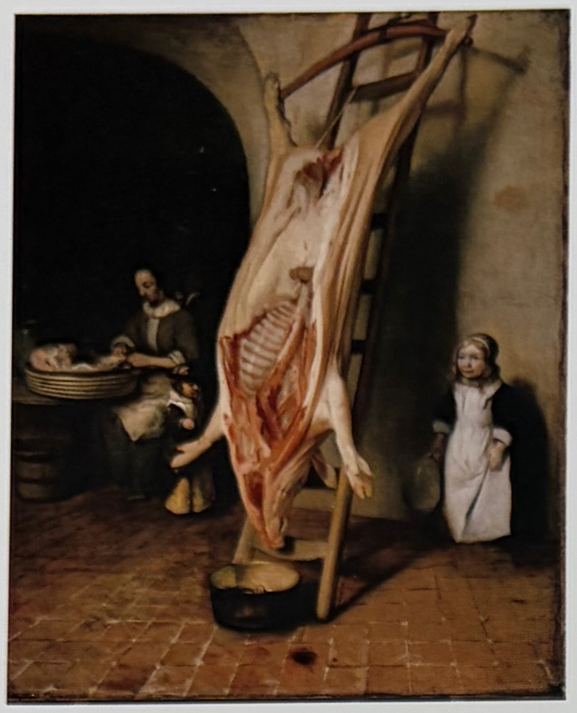
Manuela Ammer

Jutta Koether, *Existenzgründer*, 1987. Oil on canvas, 11 13/16 × 8 ½ inches (30 × 24 cm)

Hell, what a space! Space!
—Jutta Koether

Berlin, July 2017. *Klassensprachen* is taking shape.[2] I send Jutta Koether a snapshot of the *K–Bild* "in situ," which she made for our exhibition. In her reply, she suggests that before writing this text I should visit Berlin's Gemäldegalerie to see "that completely weird painting by Fabritius."[3] As so often happens, I find myself all alone in the gallery; all the other visitors have flocked to the exhibition next door. The "weird Fabritius" turns out to be *The Slaughtered Pig* of 1656 by Barent Pietersz. Fabritius, which hangs opposite a still life of a juicy ham with a knife plunged into it by the French painter Anne Vallayer-Coster—a witty "before-and-after" setup that some art historian apparently found impossible to resist.[4] Barent Pietersz. Fabritius, like his better-known older brother Carel, was a pupil of Rembrandt's (and hence presumably familiar with Rembrandt's *Slaughtered Ox*).[5] Later I will read that the poorly rendered hands in his paintings make them easy to tell apart from those of his contemporaries.[6] What is striking about *The Slaughtered Pig* is not the hands, however, but rather the carcass of the eponymous pig, pinned to a ladder with legs splayed and head down so that the blood can drain into a metal pot, its slit-open body resembling nothing so much as a hideous gash. Yet there is no sign of blood, either because it has already drained out, or because the artist was untroubled by such technicalities: both the carcass itself and the metal pot underneath it look almost clinically clean. A little girl lingers in the semishade of the dead animal. Clad in formal black and white, she seems to be smiling at us in a grubby sort of way. One possible explanation for this grubbiness could be the fact that her face—the seat of her identity—is painted in the same shades of white, pink, and red as the carcass. Or perhaps it has to do with the full-to-bursting pig's bladder that she is holding in her right hand (the hands really are a bit off), a common trope in Dutch genre paintings, symbolizing the transience of life.[7] What is genuinely dirty is the floor on which the scene plays out. The terra-cotta-colored floor tiles, which are foreshortened toward the back of the room to generate a sense of depth, are liberally smeared with rust red, brown, yellow, and green (a painter's palette!), making them the sole witness to the recently committed bloodbath. The white grouting, moreover, seems almost to have come undone in places, evoking writing in an unknown script. Three more figures, seemingly uninvolved, huddle together in a cave-like niche at back left, which unlike the illuminated carcass is obscure and swathed in gloom. The woman seated at the table has taken a knife to what must be the offal, although the contents of her basin look less like actual organs than like billowing pink gauze. The longer I contemplate the painting, the more pornographic it becomes, and the more tenuous the associations with Christ's death on the cross, which is the traditional justification for such scenes. I notice how the deep fold in the little girl's white pinafore follows the line of the gaping carcass like a faint echo. I also notice that the little girl is not smiling at all, but instead seems transfixed, despite being unable to see the carcass properly from her position behind the ladder. What does she see, I wonder? And what, exactly, am I supposed to see? Taking a still life with meat by the American painter Raphaelle Peale as an example (along with anatomical drawings from the same period), the art historian Alexander Nemerov discusses the two subjectivities that he believes existed alongside each other in the early days of the nineteenth century: the bourgeois self, which derived its identity from exercising control over dead bodies, and the self that rejected the demands of this same bourgeois subjectivity, or was actually undone by them, finding itself in the universal nonidentity of meat. Nemerov takes his analysis one stage further by associating the dark crevices in cuts of meat with the female body; he locates a point of origin at a site of death, which, like meat, is characterized by its nonidentity (or not-yet identity).[8] Is it legitimate to use a little girl painted in the seventeenth century to reflect on such modes of identification, on painterly incarnations of perpetration and victimhood, on first and last things? I take photos, close-ups of the meat, the tiled floor, the shadows, and the little girl, and decide to take a closer look at the grid-like floors of the famous *Architectural Vedute* (ca. 1490–1500) just a few galleries further on, which played an important role in the development of central perspective in the Renaissance.[9] A museum attendant, who has been observing me discreetly from a distance for some time, approaches me to ask why I am so transfixed by this one painting. I tell her about the "terra-cotta grid," about blood and color, and other formal matters, whereupon she launches into a long disquisition on the slaughtering of hogs in Saxony-Anhalt, which she remembers from having grown up on a farm there during the postwar years. I feel like an idiot. A few months later, I chance on Michael Baxandall's 1985 book *Patterns of Intention* and am struck by how he closes his chapter on Piero della Francesca: "What is not critically useful is not criticism. And the test of usefulness is public,"[10] he writes, adding, "Inferential criticism … restores the authority of common visual experience of a pictorial order. It is conversable and it is democratic.… If one looks at the origins of modern art history and art criticism … it is noticeable that really it arose out of conversation.… After all, why else than for dialogue do something as hard and as odd as attempting to verbalize about pictures? I shall claim inferential criticism is not only rational but sociable."[11]

Graz, October 1987. The centerpiece of Jutta Koether's third solo exhibition, *The things art makes*[12] at the Galerie Bleich-Rossi, is an acrylic glass case with 172 little paintings trapped inside it. Mounted back-to-back, the eighty-six double panels are arranged in a regular grid over all six sides of the transparent box. (Those on top are sandwiched between two sheets of acrylic glass, while those on either side are suspended from threads like curtains or links in a chain.) While the panels that form the "outer skin" show pictorial motifs painted in reddish hues, those on the inside are "handwritten" in various shades of pink and white. The title of this showpiece on four legs is *Universal Wealth*, and by



Barent Pietersz. Fabritius, *The Slaughtered Pig*, 1656.
Oil on canvas, 31 ⅞ × 26 ⅜ inches (80.9 × 66.9 cm)

a curious coincidence, the exhibition views taken in Graz show it to have been standing on a floor made of terra-cotta-colored tiles. While there is no little girl, there is certainly no shortage of "girly" attributes—lipstick, flowers, hearts, mannequins with skirts, draped and gathered textiles, ladies' legs, stylized lower bodies and pudenda, a torso with an opulent pearl necklace, a portrait of a woman, crystals, a cushion (wasn't Snow White laid out on a cushion in her glass casket?), and so on and so forth. Having said that, there are also tanks, shells, projectiles, a rocket, several flags (we can make out a German flag and the American Stars and Stripes), a kind of death's-head or mask, numerous eyes (alone, in pairs, or in clusters), and a fist festooned with knuckle-dusters. All these things are embedded in quasi-abstract panels, which in turn work according to the logic of the series, the grid, the agglomeration. In other words, they line up the ball-, lump-, knob-, cookie-, button-, and coin-shaped objects in cellular, picture-shaped units. The white highlights applied to many of these armies of identical or similar items make them appear to be glowing, or can be read as gaps through which we glimpse bright light illuminating the handwritten interior (enlightenment!) of the box. That this work rests on questions of existential import is brought home by a related painting showing a red box with rudimentary facial features and four legs. Pasted onto it is the label *Existenzgründer*—the German word for a start-up, literally "existence founder." How said existence might be conceived is demonstrated by a sister painting in the same format showing a death's-head with long hair, radiant eye sockets, and a bared "dental grid"—the ultimate (in the sense of both "last" and "most universal") portrait. The idea of a crate- or box-shaped body, that is to say, the idea of the body as box, receptacle, or housing, had been a preoccupation of Koether's for several years by then. Starting in 1983, she produced paintings with quasi-architectural geometric solids—cubes, cuboids, pyramids, etc.—which were endowed with anthropomorphic features. They "emanated" or "secreted" something, or might even "return" the viewer's gaze, engaging in some primitive form of communication. Some of these housings have little windows that anticipate the picture grid of *Universal Wealth*; others are fitted with legs or interlock with human bodies (or parts thereof) in some other way. But there is also a whole series of bodies—for the most part female—that are schematic, geometric, and furnished with openings. The stylized pudendum makes its debut in the 1985 painting *Double Indemnity*, where it sits alongside a "black square" like an omen of a new grammar. (In *Hausse* of 1985, a flag blazoned with the word "SECRET" is viewed in conjunction with a framed triangular "orifice," suddenly bringing us palpably closer to the concept of "secretion.")[13] After 1985, the heads and faces that until then had either been trimmed away or taken the form of ball-shaped finials began to snap into focus in "portraits" that made them complicit in their own veiling, concealment, or partial defacement, so tapping into the modernist notion of the face as facade and painting as masquerade.[14] The titles of Koether's works of those years likewise tell of her interest in objectification. The deliberately ambiguous *Tailor-Made Case* is a good example of this, as is *Today I am a small blue thing* (both 1985). Other works—*Choose me!*, also 1985, for example [ill. p. 346]—appeal directly to the viewer, much as a promotional prospectus would, and make the body not just an object but a commodity by implying the exchange of naked flesh for cash.[15] The first real grid paintings were produced the following year (some of them for the exhibition *Terminal Islands*, curated by Diedrich Diederichsen at the Forum Stadtpark in Graz). Seemingly organic at first, then coalescing into silhouettes of heads [ill. p. 352] and things, the monochrome grids' subjects, glinting with specks of light, eventually conquer the canvas as "pure" surface phenomena. Titles like *Principle Wireless Station* claim once more that here something is being "transmitted." *First Class Road* (1986) was the first work to feature a grid-like constellation of single (still variously sized) paintings, and hence can be viewed as a precursor to the side panels of *Universal Wealth.* Viewing all the works that preceded *Universal Wealth* together, the impression we gain of Koether is that of an artist who wants to bring painting face to face with its origins, with fragments of those historical (and prehistorical) milestones that crucially shaped its identity: the moment the first permanent mark or sign was made on a cave wall; the moment that perspectival depiction of space and bodies became painting's most important mission (a task that essentially entailed stage-managing both the figures inside the painting and the viewers contemplating it); the moment when illusionism was abandoned and painting was henceforth bound only by its two-dimensional support. The grid, the housing, the orifices, the eyes, the fragmented faces and body parts, still lifes, dead nature—they all drift through Koether's early paintings like ghosts through some amorphous twilit realm. And again and again, that enigmatic pudendum in their midst—a new vanishing point?

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Jutta Koether, *Paris*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 13 ¾ × 8 ⅔ inches (35 × 22 cm)

Jutta Koether, *Double Indemnity*, 1985. Oil on canvas, 12¼ × 9½ inches (31 × 24 cm)

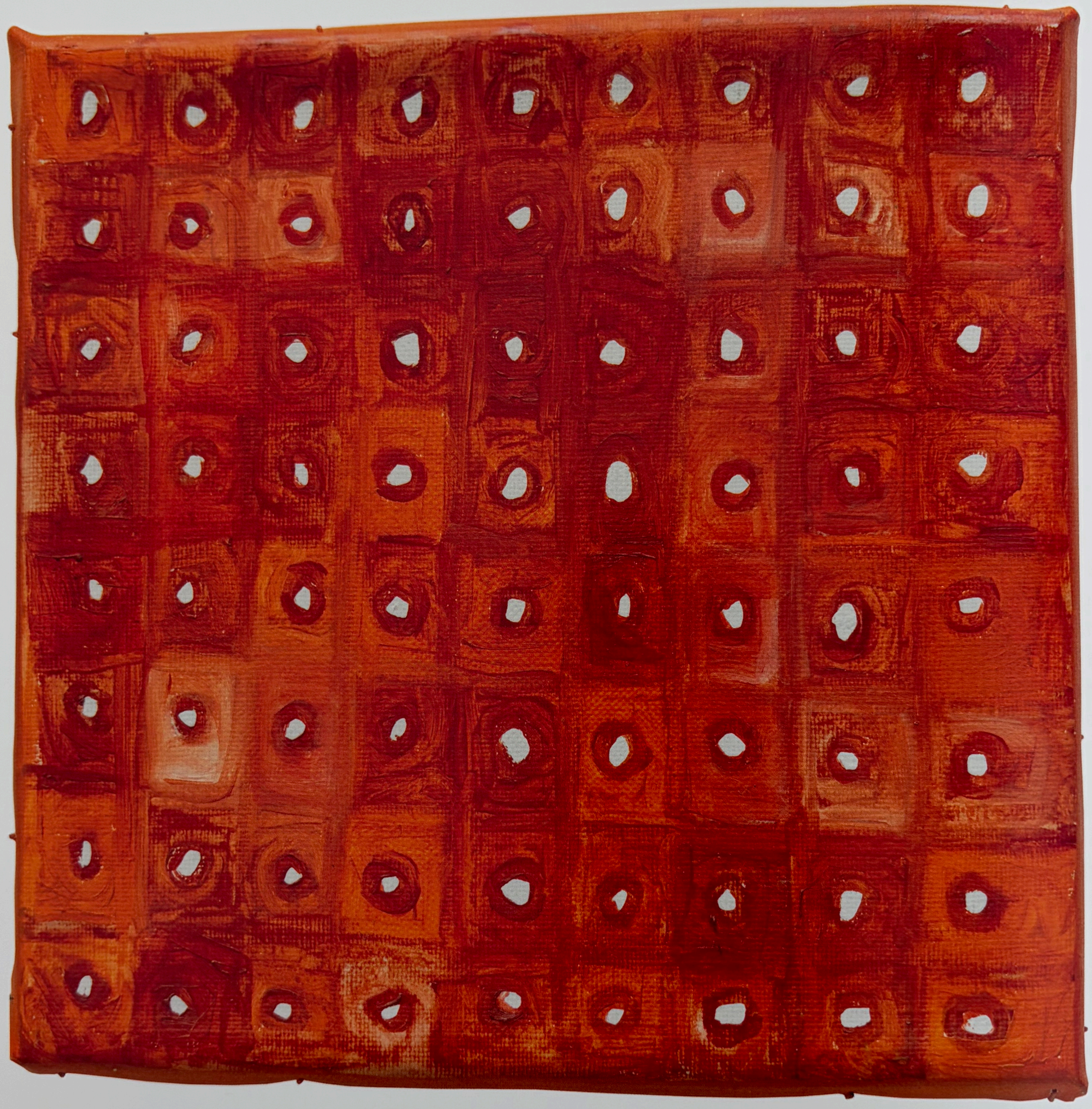
Universal Wealth embodies the question of what kind of structure painting is, and how, if at all, a female artist of the 1980s might occupy it. What are the perspectives? What level of commitment does it demand? How high is the price? The work seeks to provide an answer in the form of housing that is made up exclusively of surfaces—transparent and opaque surfaces pieced together to form an empty cavity that can be peered into but that puts up barriers nonetheless. This same housing is constructed in such a way that the things depicted—attributes of femininity and warfare—are prevented from either cutting themselves off or from forming a hierarchy; they are rather held by an invisible grid, which, like a hall of mirrors or an echo chamber, works with the principles of repetition, alliance, and reinforcement. To speak of a body on maximum alert is certainly legitimate. Koether's signature red and distinctive imagery—ranging from the erotic and the primitively organic to death itself—demand as much; even though we are dealing here with a body that vehemently rejects the natural, or rather distills "naturalness" to such an extent that it becomes visible as artificial—artistic—rhetoric. This rhetorical body in turn is given cover by the Word, which here is not made flesh, but appears to us instead as writing, specifically handwriting, whose role in painting has traditionally been confined to the signature as a seal of authenticity, identity, and hence value. Here, however, it takes the form of painted writing or written painting, and as such comes across as emphatically didactic, like a blackboard exercise that uses shading, highlighting, and red glitter as cheap effects to detract from the author's lack of ability. Koether treats the words on the inside of the vitrine much as she does the images on the outside. She forces them into repetitive loops, creating juxtapositions and elective affinities, so that any naturalized meaning comes undone. She appropriates them for rhetorical figures and bilingual maneuvers that put the "Welt der Kunststoffe" ("world of synthetics"), the world of "money" and "power" on a collision course with "das Wahre" ("the true"), "essence," "meaning," and "beauty." "Dirt Purity / Purity Dirt / Dirt Purity"—*Universal Wealth* does not judge. Dirt is as much a resource as purity, life as much as death, light as much as darkness. The scene of this late capitalist–existential spectacle is art, and inscribed onto this art is the identity that goes by the name Jutta Koether. This identity can be pieced together out of the handwritten panels, which, CV-like, list the solo exhibitions in which the then-young Koether had so far taken part. Or we take "Art Making Year #29" and hence the year of Koether's birth as our starting point and subscribe to a concept of artistic identity in which all those impressions and utterances that signify life—from the child's first drawings and the process of learning to write—count as necessary and equivalent parts of a larger whole that only ends, relatively speaking, with death (since "Glory Glory" and "Star Power" may continue). The inside of the vitrine, in other words, incarnates what is outside it, what precedes it, and what might conceivably follow it, but also the context in and for which the object was made ("Cologne Graz," "Year 1987"), and which the object itself represents. As an exhibition tie-in, Koether published a novella called simply *f.* (the dictionary abbreviation for "feminine" or "following"), which—as a kind of position paper on the positioning device *Universal Wealth*—extended the three-dimensional grid that defines the relationship between the words and pictures into an autofictional narrative space.[16] "That's how it is in the twenty-ninth year of one's life, Mrs. Benway said to herself, that I notice that things show particular reactions when they come into contact with other things to which they are related by virtue of their composition. But the point where these affinities are contested, and even any new relations among things, that point is me."[17] The "I" in *f.* is an empty space that is continuously being reclaimed—by Mrs. Benway, Lucie Beyer, Herma, and Herma's sister—or, to put it another way, it is a modality that manifests itself as this or that or in this or that character, depending on its state at any given time. A variable, just as the images and words in *Universal Wealth* are variables, this "I" is not an abstraction, but something that comes with a specific name, specific attitudes, and specific feelings. "This place is I." What kind of a place is this I? "Existenz Be / Gründer Hell / Existenz," says one of the panels on the inside of the acrylic glass box, whereupon that same *hell* (*Hölle* in German, which in turn evokes *Höhle*, "cave"; at the same time *hell* is also the German word for "bright") becomes the only place to receive multiple mentions there.[18] Koether drew a picture of this hell in a text called "20 Minutes" published in 1989.[19] The narrator of that text dies multiple deaths, and after each new death spends twenty minutes in hell. Over the course of those aggregated twenty minutes she makes "non-compatibles compatible" for herself, lets the world blow up behind her, becomes famous, forgets her name, gets a new one, and invents new hairstyles. Hell may know history, but it has none of its own; it is a place of the present, of beginnings, of repetition, of return. "Death follows death. 20 minutes follow 20 minutes. I follow I." Nor is hell the opposite of heaven, being rather firmly embedded in the real world. It is a place where relationships take effect, even if only for twenty minutes at a time—i.e., long enough to make an impact, but not long enough for it to be exploited, as would happen in the real world. Hell is the opposition and sister of *Helle* and *Höhle* (literally, "brightness" and "cave"), just as Herma's sister is both opposition and sister of Herma. Hell is a tactical abstraction ("Too bad I can't take a photograph!"), even though collected within it—not at a single, imaginary ground zero, point of origin, or vanishing point, but rather on a plane—are concrete things and words: things and words that are kept visible, sweet and sticky, like honey in a honeycomb: *Universal Wealth*.

Jutta Koether's hell is a space (a subjectivity) defined as much by fantasies of transgression as by fantasies of discipline. There, the painter is both perpetrator and victim. There, painting's intrinsic logic of originality and authenticity is multiplied: All qualities are "100 percent" embodied, but only for "20 minutes," after which they are discarded, affiliated, or antagonized. In hell, the painter is alone but never lonely. The grid creates this place by defining limits; it allows intensities to seep out without debasing

Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski), *The Golden Days*, 1944–46.
Oil on canvas, 58 ¼ × 78 ⅜ inches (148 × 199 cm)

them, and enables them to enter into dialogue or to present as figures of speech. Where the grid itself occurs as a figure, specifically as a checkerboard-like emblem—like a flag, a button, or a bumper sticker—it marks the place of painting as the scene of just such a temporary incarnation. What Koether would later call her "Bruised Grids" grew out of an exercise begun on December
119 10, 2000, which entailed coloring in one preprinted red grid with colored crayons every day for a whole year. The exercise ended 512 drawings later, on May 6, 2002, and can now be viewed as a
118 video showing all the drawings in succession.[20] The project combined what Koether delegated to the grid right from the start—the articulation of antagonisms and alliances, expansion into fields (of color), and abrupt changes (of color)—with something new: the abstract drawings and their "hand-drawn pixels"[21] are not themselves *expressive* but more like bearers of *moods*, that is to say, an ousted, diffused, and mutable expressiveness—like mandalas without any center, whose creation entails combining the tiniest with the greatest, and internalizing things only to externalize them again. Grids would henceforth be a regular feature of Koether's work—painted grids, that is, most of them in atmospheric shades of red, orange, and pink; it was not by chance that these "mood bearers" slowly but surely approximated album-cover format, becoming inseparably associated with the fleeting, if collective, experience of making and listening to music. In much the same way, light began to play a much more substantial role in the presentation of Koether's paintings. Her first New York survey exhibition, *I Is Had Gone* (2005), for example, featured a small pink grid painting reflected in a shiny polyester curtain (a dazzling ensemble also comprising silver walls, gold cloth, and tinsel).[22]
133, 135 Finally, in 2008, the grid pictures appeared en bloc as "Demonic Options", a series that met its match in, of all things, different
132, 136 interpretations of one and the same template: a Cézanne still life with fruit.[23] That encounter revealed a potential that Koether has since explored further, namely, the capacity of the grid as a stabilizing void to absorb and contain unstable plenitudes, which makes it a vehicle of *intuition* that temporarily sets aside the individual's own subjectivity for the sake of another, imagined one. It flanks a process of painterly appropriation, whose goal is not distance but absolute proximity. *Champrovent*, Koether's exhibition at Reena Spaulings Fine Art in New York in 2014, is a case in point. There, a row of album-cover-size "Bruised Grids" lined up along the wall of the elongated gallery led into a window-fronted space, where three painterly *intuitions* were presented behind a partition. The gallery's fluorescent lights were all deactivated (some of them pasted over with legible texts, such as a Bataille-like fragment about "the image of the 'provident sun'"), so that the gallery, instead of being bathed in the same homogeneous light at all times of day, developed a cave-like ambience in the front and a dazzling brightness at the back. Depending on the time of day, beams of sunlight migrated along the walls, raking the individual paintings, whose luminous iridescent pigments answered the caress—an effect that proved impossible to reproduce in photographs of the show.[24] The three figurative paintings near the window-fronted space at the back showed bodies reposing or at rest, bodies that, despite being aware of their environs and exteriors, seemed to be preoccupied primarily with what was going on within. These bodies, some of them propped on furniture, are presented to us in safe havens of fantasy as images that capture a process of recording and transfer: Lucian Freud's reclining nude portrait of his studio assistant of many years, David Dawson (to whom Koether lends hermaphroditic traits), portrayed together with his dog; the concentrated/concentric ear and eye of *The Young Schoolmistress* by Jean-Siméon Chardin (after an etching by Freud); a Balthus girl lounging on a chaise longue, legs apart, as if offering herself up to her own mirror image. The open and transparent way in which Koether adopts her models in the fleshy color scale of her "Bruised Grids" betrays the same ease and permeability demonstrated by the bodies in those paintings.[25] In Koether's *Golden Days* (2014), however, the erotic arousal experienced 157
by Balthus's girl via her hand mirror is witnessed not by the man stoking the fire but by the grid picture adorning the formerly bare chimney piece, whether as ornament or mark. A slight shift is all that Koether needs to make two decorative figures—the girl basking in her own decorativeness and the gaudy grid—compositional accomplices. *Golden Days II* (2014),[26] which opened her next 158
exhibition *Maquis*, at Galerie Francesca Pia in Zurich in 2014, articulated this same complicity as penetration in the form of an "allover." Here, the grid superimposed on the Balthus picture (or on Koether's portrait of the Balthus picture?) like a filter or veil appropriates it pore for pore, even while tactically pixelating the paradoxically superficial intimacy of the encounter. Also part of *Maquis* (French for "thicket") were still more representations—mounted on freestanding pillars—of reposing bodies brought down by death, sex, or dance. Koether's invocations of Rosso Fiorentino's *Descent from the Cross*, of Piero di Cosimo's *Venus, Mars, and Cupid* (with the "Bruised Grids" as cushion), and of a female torso with exposed pudendum by Freud, which 167
shares its pictorial space with the figure of the deconstructivist

Top: Installation view, *The things art makes – The poetry of economical analysis when translated into a foreign language – or, we never really understood a pop-song*, Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Graz, Austria, 1987
Bottom: Installation view, *Champrovent*, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York, 2014



Jutta Koether, *Principal Wireless Station*, 1986. Oil on canvas, 7¾ × 7¾ inches (20 × 20 cm)

Piero della Francesca, *Madonna del Parto*, ca. 1455. Fresco, 102¼ × 80 inches (260 × 203 cm)

Flamenco dancer Israel Galván (wearing the slippers of Balthus's girl).[27] Identifying this *Maquis*, a place of lawlessness, as an updated version of Koether's hell is not difficult. Here, the fallen, "marked" bodies rise up again, having abandoned themselves only to return, reborn and refreshed, under somewhat different circumstances—i.e., in the here and now, red, digital, expansive, decorative, primordial, under the substrate's sun. By no means the least of what was mobilized in *Maquis* was Koether's first
168 *Boogie*, a formation of "Bruised Grids" arranged in a (pudendum-like) triangle, which when joined together to form a square matched the dimensions of *Golden Days II*.[28]

By the time Koether's novella, *f.*—the "position paper" on the "existence founder," *Universal Wealth*—was republished in 2015, nearly thirty years after she wrote it, not only had the painter herself and her painting changed, but so had the larger context in which she was positioning herself. Capital and corpus, space and grid, pose and provocation—all had been digitally reinvented. Coinciding with the resurrection of *f.* in 2015 was Koether's exhibition *Fortune* at Bortolami in New York, whose focus was on those bodies that are subjected to the glare of public attention—bodies around which the fickle wheel of fortune temporarily turns. With their figures and scenes outlined in fluorescent red on a polar white background and surrounded by luminously metallic painterly schemata, the paintings on show there had the same penetrating brightness as screens. A timed switch that bathed the exhibition space in "dark," "light," or "very bright" light served to simulate the inconstant meteorological conditions outside or even just the circadian rhythm of day and night. The paintings themselves responded to the changes with superficial effects ranging from dazzling overexposure and Photoshop-style filtering to the mystical rainbow iridescence of mother-of-pearl. The diptych *Tate BP Bacon Balthus PdF* (2015) [ill. p. 268] showed the now-grown Balthus girl sitting on a bench in a museum with "Bruised Grids" standing in for the seat's legs. Her own legs chastely and firmly pressed together, she is literally split by the gap between the diptych's halves. The familiar slippers apparently still fit her awkwardly positioned feet. In her hand she is holding not a pig's bladder but a purse decorated with yet another "Bruised Grid." What the grown-up girl is contemplating is not (literally) dead meat, but rather a mutation of Francis Bacon's *Triptych August 1972* (1972), which was acquired for the collection of Tate Modern in London with funds provided by British Petroleum. (The museum's nearly thirty-year-long partnership with BP was at last terminated following extended protests in 2017.) Koether, too, has a writhing body occupy the central panel, but Bacon's seated figures seeking to escape themselves have been replaced by a sphinx-like reposing wildcat at left and a fragment of a reclining female nude with exposed pudendum at right—the latter an appropriation of a Balthus drawing after Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*, the ultimate female nude. (It is worth remembering here that the 2014 Balthus show at the Metropolitan Museum in New York was titled *Cats and Girls: Paintings and Provocations*.) Spherical objects—balls, fruit, breasts—appear to be tumbling out of inserts in the upper right-hand and left-hand corners of the outer panels into the middle of the triptych. As tempting as it is to read the abbreviation "PdF" in the title as a reference to Adobe's Portable Document Format, and to connect this both with the versatile and stoic "Bruised Grids" and the fact that, here, paintings from different contexts and periods have been merged together in a format dissociated from the "original files," the small "d" is enough to cause suspicion. What "PdF" (also) stands for is "Pigment dispersing Factor," a hormone-producing gene that steers the circadian rhythm of many life-forms in response to the prevailing light. One painting that could scarcely be further removed from the digital age and from biogenetics, but that nevertheless has the power to take us even deeper into this image, is the *Madonna del Parto*, a fresco completed circa 1455 by Piero della Francesca and housed in a museum in Monterchi, Italy, whose reappearance at the end of this text brings us full circle. Dominating the work is the figure of the Madonna herself—a woman with child, carrying within her a male sacrificial offering—standing inside a tent decorated with pomegranates on the outside and lined on the inside with furs arranged in a grid. The Virgin's gaze is introverted; her expressive hands support and shield her swollen belly. She has unbuttoned her blue gown down the front to accommodate her belly, exposing a white shift underneath. The positioning of her feet matches that of the grown-up girl in Koether's work, and flanking her are two angels, who draw aside the fur-lined brocade of the cave-like tent, much as they would stage curtains. The angels are copies of each other, that is to say, complementary mirror images painted from the same pounced cartoon. The colors, however, are reversed, so that where the one wears red, the other wears green, and vice versa. The painting of the *Madonna del Parto* appears at a crucial moment in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Nostalghia*, from 1983—the year Koether painted her first, quasi-architectural bodies with

anthropomorphic traits, bodies that emanate or secrete something, that return the gaze, and that have legs and orifices anticipating the grid of *Universal Wealth*. Tarkovsky's film is about a Russian writer who travels to Italy to write the biography of a Russian composer who lived in exile there, but who became so homesick that he eventually returned. Himself tormented by memories of his native country (and his mother), the writer seeks out those places where his compatriot once lived, among them Monterchi, and there discovers a kindred spirit in an eccentric mathematician, who together with his dog is awaiting the end of the world in the ruins of an old building. Over the course of the film, the fictional identities of the writer, the composer, and the eccentric mathematician become enmeshed. The mission of the latter is to save both himself and the world through a ritual self-sacrifice, which is ultimately performed by the main character—and hence by the author, Tarkovsky, who in 1983 decided not to return to the Soviet Union, but to stay in Italy instead (making *Nostalghia* his first film shot outside the Soviet Union). The existential aspect of Tarkovsky's films is not a product of plot, but instead is conveyed in the form of mood, generated by his almost static visual language of constantly recurring motifs and autobiographical elements, and by symbolic tinting, his practice of bathing images in color and sound. In the introduction to his autobiography, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on Cinema*, first published in English in 1986 (and in German a year earlier), Tarkovsky wrote that it was his contact with audiences that induced him to write his book, "that truth is reached through dispute."[29] He also quotes letters received from viewers over the years, including one from a woman in Gorsky: "You know, in that dark cinema, looking at a piece of canvas lit up by your talent, I felt for the first time in my life that I was not alone." Another was from a worker in Leningrad who was studying for a degree at night school: "If two people have been able to experience the same thing even once, they will be able to understand each other. Even if one lived in the era of the mammoth and the other in the age of electricity." Another was from a female worker in Novosibirsk: "Everything that torments me, everything I don't have and that I long for, that makes me indignant, or sick, or suffocates me, everything that gives me a feeling of light and warmth, and by which I live, and everything that destroys me—it's all there in your film, I see it as if in a mirror. For the first time ever a film has become something *real* for me, and that's why I go to see it, I want to get right inside it, so that I can really be *alive*."[30] Looking at Koether's grown-up girl, guarded, supported, and decorated by "Bruised Grids" and by the slippers of her youth, posing in silent dialogue in front of her version of an iconic Passion, I imagine her to be somewhat nostalgic, perhaps, but certainly not homeless.

For we are so sure of living again (without resurrection) only because so many beings and things think in us.
–Gilles Deleuze on Pierre Klossowski, 1965

NOTES

1. *Opposition and Sister Squares Reconciled* is the title of a 1932 chess manual by chess master Vitaly Halberstadt and Marcel Duchamp, in which the authors analyze those rare endgames in which kings and pawns are the only remaining pieces on the board.
2. *Klassensprachen* is a long-term project undertaken jointly by Eva Birkenstock, Jenny Nachtigall, Kerstin Stakemeier, Stephanie Weber, and the author. Jutta Koether contributed a *K-Bild* to the exhibition of the same name at District Berlin in the summer of 2017.
3. Jutta Koether, email message to author, July 21, 2017.
4. Anne Vallayer-Coster, *Still Life with Ham, Bottles, and Radishes*, 1767.
5. *Slaughtered Ox* (1655) in the Louvre is known to be by Rembrandt; the version in Glasgow, which was painted circa 1640, is now either attributed to Carel Pietersz. Fabritius or deemed to be a product of Rembrandt's workshop.
6. W. R. Valentiner, "Carel and Barent Fabritius," *Art Bulletin* 14, no. 3 (September 1932): 197–241.
7. Many scholars have linked animal bladders to the *vanitas* theme of the *homo bulla*, i.e., to the notion of human life as fragile and transient as a "bubble." (The German word *Blase* means both "bladder" and "bubble".)
8. Alexander Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood, 1812–1824* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001). See especially the chapters "Meat and Nonidentity," "The Anatomized Still Life," "Dissector and Dissected: Self and Body," and "Abjection: Still Life and the Return of the Maternal Body."
9. Cf., e.g., Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).
10. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 136.
11. Baxandall, *Patterns*, 137.
12. The exhibition's entire title was: *The things art makes – The poetry of economical analysis when translated into a foreign language – or, we never really understood a pop-song*.
13. Double indemnity is a clause in an insurance policy that doubles the payout in certain cases of accidental death. It is also the title of a 1944 film noir directed by Billy Wilder and starring Barbara Stanwyck about a double-indemnity insurance fraud.
14. Cf. Edith Futscher, *Diesseits der Fassade. Kryptoportraits der Moderne zwischen Bildnis und Stillleben* (*The Here and Now of Facade. Modern Crypto-Portraits between Effigy and Still Life*) (Vienna and Klagenfurt: Ritter, 2001).
15. *Choose Me* is the title of a 1984 film written and directed by Alan Rudolph that stars Keith Carradine as a pathological storyteller in a comedy-drama about sex and love in 1980s Los Angeles.
16. Jutta Koether, *f.* (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1987), 29. The novella, enlarged by the addition of an English translation, was republished in 2015: Jutta Koether, *f.*, eds. Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, trans. Nicholas Mauss and Michael Sanchez (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015).
17. Koether, *f.*, 27–28. "Mrs. Benway" is the name of a monthly art column that Jutta Koether wrote for the Cologne-based music magazine *SPEX* from 1985 to 1990. Koether's Mrs. Benway is essentially a female equivalent of William S. Burroughs's "Dr. Benway" or "Doc Benway," an unscrupulous surgeon who features in several of Burroughs's novels, including *Naked Lunch* and *Nova Express*.
18. The cities of Cologne, Graz, and Cairo, each of which is mentioned only once, define a different category of place.
19. Koether's "20 Minuten/20 Minutes" was printed both in a book of the same name published as a tie-in to her exhibition at the Galerie Monika Sprüth in 1989 and—with minimal deviations—in the third edition of the magazine *Eau de Cologne*, published by Koether together with Karen Marta and Sprüth that same year. Also reprinted in that third installment was Linda Nochlin's essay "Courbet's *L'origine du monde*: The Origin without

an Original," first published in *October* in 1986, in which the art historian describes her quest for Courbet's "scandalous" painting—a quasi-pornographic rendering of a woman's genitals—whose whereabouts were still unknown at the time. (The painting, which last belonged to Jacques Lacan, was eventually found and presented to the public for the first time in the Courbet retrospective that Nochlin cocurated at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 1988.) Koether's first paraphrase of the Courbet painting—a red watercolor headed *Eau de Cologne 3*—was painted in 1988 as a "realistic" counterpart to the stylized pudenda of the mid-1980s and thereafter.

20. The drawings were first presented to friends and anyone else interested on the floor of Koether's apartment. For the show *Extremes Europe* at the Galerie Buchholz in Cologne in 2002, a whole stack of drawings inside a box was exhibited in a vitrine together with the video; also exhibited on that occasion were various paintings—most of them of faces—connected with Koether's character "Shirly."

21. Jutta Koether, "Shirly," in *Born to be a Star*, exhibition brochure (Vienna: Künstlerhaus Wien, 2004): 4–5.

22. Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, 2005. The centerpiece of this show was the portrait cycle "Hysterics," in which Koether homes in on modes of desubjectivization.

23. *THE FACT THAT YOU PLACE YOUR BET ON RED DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE BLACK IS NOT STILL THERE*, Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich, 2008.

24. In 2016 Koether made a suite of "Bruised Grids" bearing the title *Travelling Light*.

25. Koether's *Lucian David Eli* (2013) references Lucian Freud's *David and Eli* (2003–2004), and her *Ear Freud Chardin* (2013) Freud's critical engagement with Chardin's *The Young Schoolmistress* (1740). Freud produced two etchings after that painting: *After Chardin* shows the whole composition (reversed left to right), while *After Chardin (Small Plate)* (both 2000) focuses on the profile view of the teacher with what, according to Freud, was the "most interesting ear in the collection" of the National Gallery in London. The model for Koether's *Golden Days* (2013) was Balthus's *Les Beaux Jours* (1944–46), which the artist himself described as a memory of Champrovent, the country manor in the Savoy where he spent the first couple years of World War II. (A room resembling the one he painted has never been found at Champrovent.)

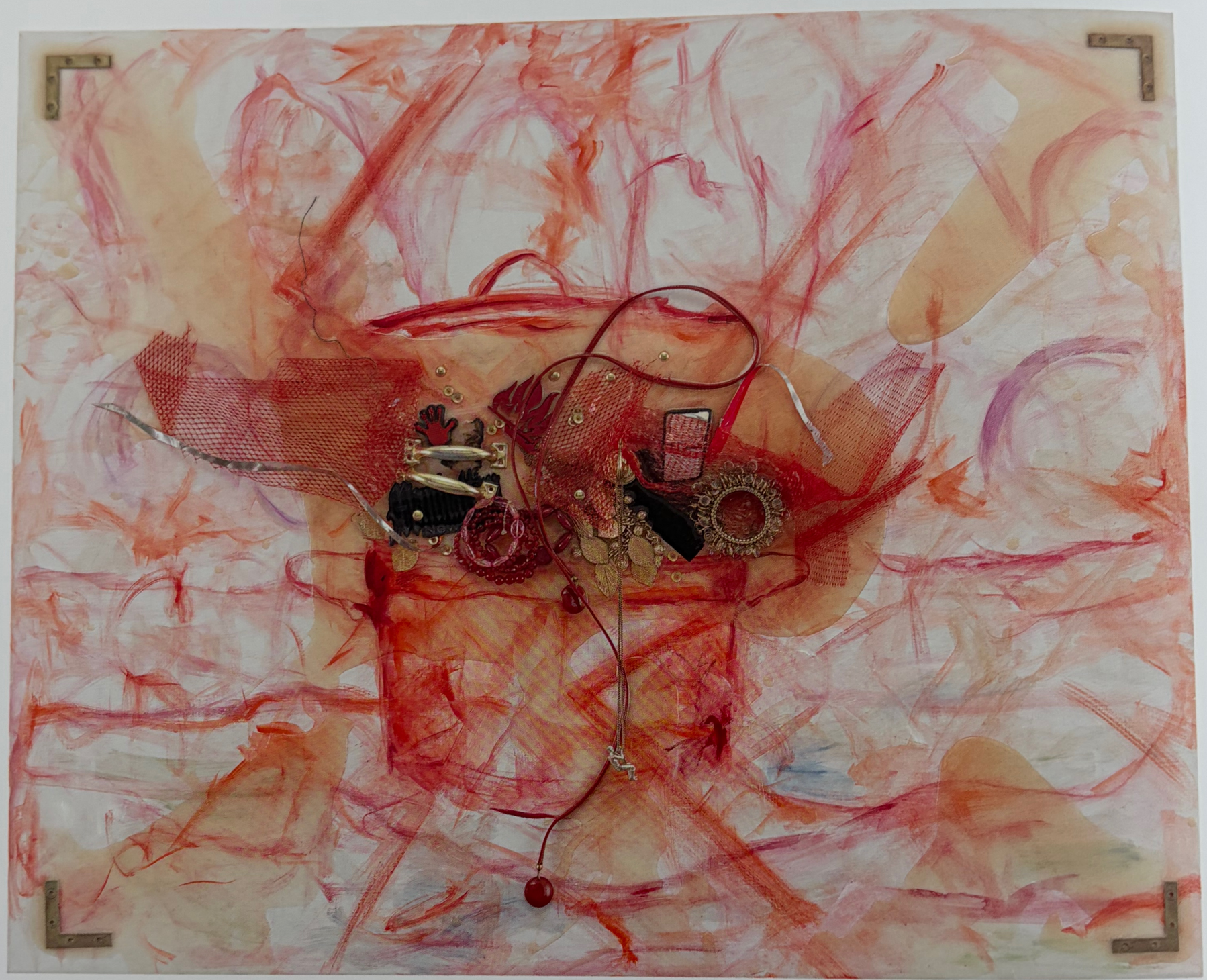
26. Later renamed *A Bar at... #7 (Bruised Grid)*.

27. Koether's *Fiorentino Rosso Sansepolcro* references Rosso Fiorentino's *Descent from the Cross* (1521) in the church of San Lorenzo in Sansepolcro, and her *Cosimo Piero Gemäldegalerie* (2014) the work *Venus, Mars, and Cupid* (ca. 1505) by Piero di Cosimo in the titular museum in Berlin.

28. Koether's *Maquis Berlin Boogie* (2014) is made up of thirty-five LP cover-format canvases that can be configured variably. Piet Mondrian's "Boogie-Woogie-Paintings" from the 1940s and John Lee Hooker's "Boogie Chillen'" (1948) are influences here in equal measure.

29. Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (London: Bodley Head, 1986), 11.

30. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 10–12.



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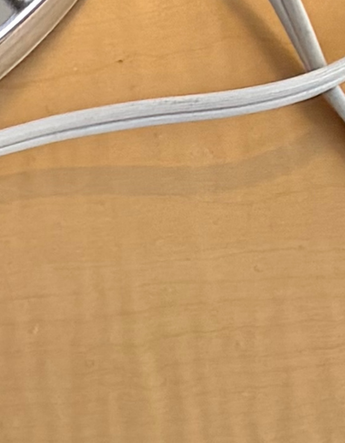

POSSESSED PAINTING
APPROPRIATION AS AN "AFFECTIVE IMPORT" IN THE WORK OF JUTTA KOETHER

Julia Gelshorn

Jutta Koether, *Spargelbund*, 1989. Oil on canvas, 17¾ × 21⅔ inches (45 × 55 cm)

How does something get written into history? What role does Cézanne play for me? When Jutta Koether was establishing herself as an artist during the 1980s in Cologne, these were the fundamental questions she was asking herself. Her friends and colleagues, Rosemarie Trockel and Martin Kippenberger, tackled them with wit and irony, but Koether ruled out a playful or strategic approach. Instead, she tried to forge her path as a painter via a "flight into art history."[1] In 1988, Koether began transferring iconic modernist works, such as Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1889), Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (1866), and Édouard Manet's *Bunch of Asparagus* (1880), into her distinctive red-and-black gestural style of painting. Two years later, in *Cézanne, Courbet, Manet, van Gogh, Ich*, she explicitly posited a direct line to these father figures.[2] The mixture of coarsely applied opaque reds and smears of black in these works, alongside white, yellow, and pink highlights, defamiliarizes rather than recalls the originals. Moreover, Koether's preferred visual motifs do not escape distortion either: van Gogh's luminous stars are juxtaposed with a landscape comprising round, seemingly organic forms reminiscent of breasts; in other versions, the stars themselves mutate into breasts—a recurring visual element in Koether's painting. Through their use of vivid signal colors, these paintings seem to be vehemently demanding the right to trace their own idiosyncratic history of painting.

In contrast to her demonstratively female "occupation" of clichéd male role models, Koether's later appropriations are more nuanced: the red is translucent, facilitating the layering of various pictorial elements in enigmatic configurations, in which templates only surface as schematic designs or as fragments.[3] Although Cézanne remains a constant point of reference in Koether's painting, she doesn't confine herself to him or to any of the other fathers of modernism, instead appropriating a host of different models ranging from early-modern perspective painting—say, that of a Piero della Francesca via the classicism of a Nicolas Poussin—all the way to the Symbolists and Surrealists and to postwar figurative painting. Koether is also interested in artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Balthus, and Lucian Freud, who do not feature centrally in the art historical discourses surrounding modernism. The constant gravitation toward specific artistic positions and the recurrence of individual elements and motifs are the products of Koether's long-standing fascinations, which establish an explicitly personal genealogy of painting and an eccentric counternarrative to modernism, in which "the disconnected becomes compatible."[4] On the one hand, Koether is tracing existing relations between artists (for example, from Poussin to Francis Bacon and Freud via Cézanne); on the other, she integrates figures peripheral to accepted art historical discourse into established, canonical positions.

Close-ups of Art History

From 2006 onward, more than fifteen years after her first appropriations, Koether resumed her adaptations of Cézanne's figure paintings, still lifes, and landscapes in increasing numbers. During a particularly productive period, she adapted works by Ferdinand Hodler, Paul Gauguin, Peter Paul Rubens, Matthias Grünewald, and Sandro Botticelli and also produced grid paintings, black material paintings, and an extensive cycle of paintings on Kenneth Anger. Moreover, her installation *Lux Interior* at Reena Spaulings Fine Art in 2009 singled out Poussin as one of the most important reference points for her painting. She states that T. J. Clark's *The Sight of Death*—a close reading of two paintings by Poussin in the Getty Museum written as a sequence of diary entries[5]—provided the catalyst for her engagement with the artist. This mode of looking at paintings as suggested by Clark's literary experiment, or more specifically, his "response" to painting and its materiality through a series of intense "encounters," provided Koether with a model for her thoroughly contemplative but above all painterly engagement with particular role models in art history.[6] But what could an artist from postwar Germany living in the booming 1990s New York art scene hope to learn from a seventeenth-century classical painter?

The painting *Hot Rod (after Poussin)* (2009), from the installation *Lux Interior*, refers to Poussin's *Stormy Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*, painted in 1651. The painting's central placement on a kind of illuminated stage—coupled with Koether's interactions with the painting during ongoing performances over the course of the exhibition—have so far tended to highlight the subject status of the painting as the primary discursive focus. Whereas Sam Lewitt, for example, interprets the installation and its performative mise-en-scène as a continuation of Clark's intimate encounters with a work over time,[7] David Joselit sees the painting, by virtue of its idiosyncratic arrangement, as if it were stepping down from the stage and "into the world." He describes the installation and the performances as exemplary of the "transitive" nature of painting, which has rendered the processes of production, distribution, and reception as painting's actual subject matter.[8] In this estimation of the networks that surround painting, the specific reference to Poussin plays a subordinate role. However, in Koether's subsequent projects, the importance of appropriation to her painting—both of art historical models as well as images from popular cultural contexts, set in continually new configurations and contextualizations—emerges more clearly. The performances also tend to take a back seat, making way for a style of painting that attempts to provide that "transitive" moment on the basis of the internal logic and conditions of elements, structures, and figures, as well as the spatial positioning of the paintings themselves.

Expressive Actors

One of the regularly recurring elements in Koether's paintings, an artistic signature of sorts, is a prominently featured jagged bolt of lightning. The two bolts of lightning in *Hot Rod (after Poussin)* have been taken directly from Poussin's *Stormy Landscape*, morphing from a fine skein of lines capturing an ephemeral natural phenomenon in Poussin's work into coarse, stylized, expressive

Sandro Botticelli, *Scenes from the Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* (second panel), 1483. Mixed media on panel, 54½ × 32½ inches (138.5 × 82.5 cm)

symbols that dominate Koether's composition in a different way. The bolt of lightning is also particularly prominent in one of
129 Koether's versions of *Leibhaftige Malerei* (*Painting Incarnate*), from 2007, which is based on the second panel of Botticelli's cycle "The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti—The Banquet in the Pine Forest," from the 1480s. In Botticelli's original, it is a jagged opening between trees, rather than a bolt of lightning, which accentuates the gruesome action taking place in the foreground of the painting.

In his 1999 book *Ouvrir Vénus*, which prompted Koether's Botticelli reference, Georges Didi-Huberman refers to this "break in the sky, a sort of crevice created by the painter in the leafy mass of the forest," arguing that "in a perception open to the power of phantasm, the structure of the place itself participates empathically in the story's violence, as if the wound inflicted on the figure becomes that of space itself, before which, perhaps, our own gaze must be split and torn apart."[9] In Koether's case, the injury to the space is experienced as a wounding of the painting's body. A jagged tear is the central motif of her black, large-format version of *Leibhaftige Malerei.* The actual action in the painting, the brutal slicing open of a naked damsel's prostrate body at the hands of a knight and his dagger, can only be made out as a schematic echo in this version of *Leibhaftige Malerei*: the rough black sketch of the figures gets lost in the surrounding painted undergrowth of the enclosure. By contrast, her small-format red
128 version of the scene in oil on canvas makes Botticelli's story much easier to read. Whereas in this painting the parallels with the original include the manner in which figures are represented and the "personification" of the canvas through the layering of reds as flesh tones, in the large-format acrylic version it is the messy tumult of black lines and traces of paint that become the material site of violence "and its psychological gravity."[10] Thus, it is the very expressivity of the "personified painting" itself that ultimately frees the viewer from the actual story.

Jutta Koether wouldn't be Jutta Koether if she didn't also situate the visual components of her paintings in the here and now and search for "living traditions," as she puts it with reference to her "Mad Garland" module of work.[11] Whereas the lightning bolt—as both an energetic "pathos formula" and as a cliché—still crisscrosses virtually all of her paintings in the "Berliner Schlüssel" cycle in 2010, regardless of whether it represented a natural phenomenon or not, from 2011 onward it suddenly adopted a horizontal axis. Each painting in the series "The Seasons" and "The Seven Sacraments," based on Poussin's eponymous cycles, 150, 151, 152, 153
is punctuated with several lines zigzagging across the canvas. The jagged-line formula here has been borrowed from charts of stock-market indexes, transferring the circular model of recurring seasons into an economic-temporal framework in which a "season" or term—per the worlds of fashion, the stock market, and TV—is determined by the rhythms of production and distribution as well as consumer attitudes and behavior.[12]

The fact that there is a formal, expressive connection in Koether's work between the stock-market index and a bolt of lightning is confirmed in 2016 by material included in the booklet accompanying the exhibition *Zodiac Nudes* at Galerie Buchholz Berlin. There, Koether reproduces a page from the *New York Times* illustrating a story about "The Fall of Xu Xiang … China's undisputed hedge-fund king." The vivid graphic features a stock-market chart pitched against a red background, with a jagged yellow line plummeting into the abyss, leaving no doubt about how it must be read. The zigzagging line of the lightning strike here is coextensive with the crashing stock-market index, although concealed behind this outward formal analogy are wholly different, incompatible temporalities: the diagrammatic progression curve of the stock-market index collides with the split-second momentariness of a lightning strike. Thus, the strike mutates from a momentary natural phenomenon with a narrative function inside a historical painting to an expressive formula of the Capitalocene, in which the processes of capital accumulation are portrayed as elemental forces and, in their dramatic surges and fluctuations, resemble the amassed electrical charge of a lightning strike. In the booklet accompanying the exhibition, Koether reflects the potential for analogy and contradiction in this jagged, emotionally charged pathos formula by juxtaposing several reproductions of her early works from the series "The Seasons" and "Berliner Schlüssel" with her new paintings. As if in an experimental trial, Koether uses the motif as a kind of proactive "expressive actor" in ever-changing contexts. The lightning bolt, as an agent of excitation, will occasionally flash across oppressive scenes with nudes based on Francis Bacon (in *Untitled (couple / after Bacon)* and *Berliner Schlüssel #1* [both 2010]); at times it cuts through Koether's Poussin-inspired self-portrait (*Berliner Schlüssel #14* [2010]) and bursts open Marcel Broodthaers's *Large Pot of Mussels* (1966)—and thus the symbolism of the painting itself (*Berliner Schlüssel #4* and *#9* [both 2010]). On occasion, the horizontal zigzagging line also dissects the painting (*The Seasons III* and *IV* [both 2011]). What seems to be at stake here is the testing of conventionalized formulas as "actants" capable of engendering new, expressive moments through their combination with other pictorial elements and contextual disparity.[13] Via the title

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Top: Installation view, *Lux Interior*, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York, 2009
Bottom: Performance of *The staging of restricted means in the landscape redefines the terms of pleasure of painting …* by Jutta Koether on May 3, 2009, as part of the exhibition *Lux Interior*

Lucian Freud, *Painter Working, Reflection*, 1993.
Oil on canvas, 39⅞ × 32⅜₁₆ inches (101.2 × 81.7 cm)

"Berliner Schlüssel" and its reproduction as a seal in the upper
144, 147 border sections of individual paintings (*Berliner Schlüssel #10* and *#13* [both 2010]), Koether is also referring directly to the potential for action on behalf of the visual elements in her paintings, as did Bruno Latour in his exemplary examination of that very object, the "Schließzwangschlüssel" ("forced locking key") or Berlin key, which, through its shape and functionality, forces the user to lock the door before being able to retrieve the key from the lock.[14] Thus, the expressivity of the painting is achieved via the importing and recombination of visual "actants" that are given a new "figuration."[15]

Metamorphoses

The exhibition *Zodiac Nudes*, including the accompanying booklet, can be read here as the culmination of Koether's exploration of the expressive potential of suitable bodies and figures from the standpoint of painting. She had already put this into words in 2008 on an invitation to her show at the Galerie Francesca Pia in Zurich: "THE PROBLEM OF POUSSIN IN DEN DEPICITION [sic!] OF SUFFERING IS HOW TO STYLIZE IT AS THE RULES OF CLASSICAL ART DEMAND, WHILE YET MAKING IT IMMEDIATELY FELT."[16] As is the case with her later appropriations, Koether examines the connection between the norming of an expressive formula and its immediate effect, explicitly including the commercialized cliché of the expression.

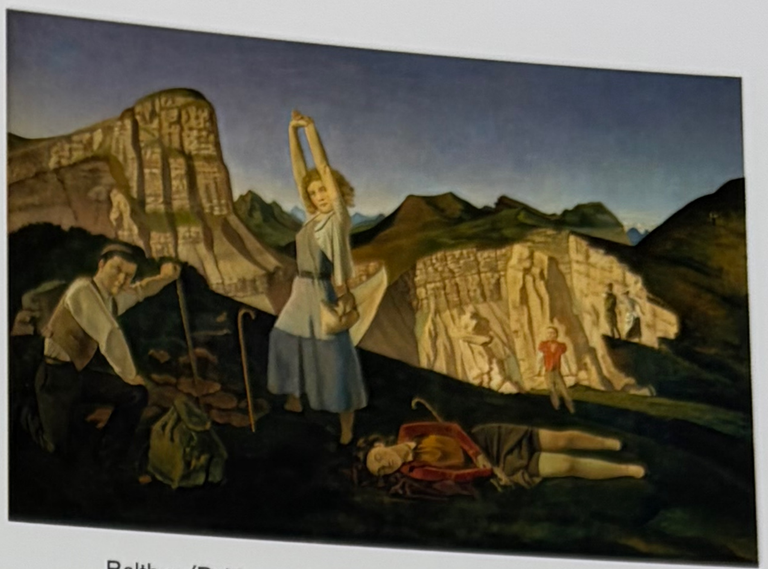
In this sense, "The Seasons" series is populated by a cast of figures culled not only from Poussin, but also from advertisements and media images. In Koether's more recent works from 2015 and 2016, the formal and gender-based superimposition and saturation of these bodies, or metamorphoses, seem to be of central importance. The heroic pathos of machine-built masculinity explored in "The Seasons" and other series is continued in *Formula Won Balthus* (2015) in the shape of the Formula
164 One driver Sebastian Vettel. As a central visual component of a monstrous, futuristic scenario, the body of Vettel's rival, Lewis Hamilton, is depicted as a Mercedes star parodying an ad with the tagline "Formula Won." Koether confronts the transfiguration of this body language into a literal symbol, a "formula," with an emblem of passive, feminized masculinity in the shape of a recumbent figure, echoing Poussin's *Narcissus* (ca. 1630) and a sleeping girl from Balthus's painting *The Mountain* (1936–37). In the painting *Bond Freud National Gallery* (2016), Koether inserts
171 herself into a self-portrait of the naked Lucian Freud at work, which she then frames in a scene from the James Bond movie *Skyfall*, in which the actor Daniel Craig is sitting in the National Gallery in London looking at a painting by J. M. W. Turner.

In Koether's adaptation—not her first use of the picture-within-a-picture structure featuring a viewer—the Bond/Craig figure, whom we see from the back, is not looking at a Turner, but instead at a pathos-filled portrait of a race-car driver. The back view of the Bond figure thus becomes a mise en abyme of the viewer of Koether's painting, whose gaze, in turn, is guided by the hermaphroditic painter within the allegorical pictorial space. The female life model mutates into the naked painter with muscular, masculine shoulders, who, like Freud, is holding brush and palette in her hands, enigmatically fusing both the production and reception of painting. *Tate BP Bacon Balthus PdF* (2015) [ill. p. 268] depicts a similar scene but refers to a Tate Gallery ad sponsored by BP. In this instance, the iconic male secret agent is replaced by a female figure and becomes the viewer of a triptych featuring a male, a female, and an animal body, referring to paintings by Bacon and Balthus, as well as to representations of a lion motif displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The abbreviation "PdF" in the title is an explicit statement of what holds true for all Koether's appropriations: ads and other media images are treated as "portable document formats" and are "transported" into her paintings. The recombination of the reformatted elements enables, through the sheer density of references, the generation of independent, perennially new effects.

The internal structure of all these paintings includes various diaphanous layers taken from recurring pictorial elements in Koether's oeuvre. On the one hand, there are the established, familiar items, such as equivocal apple-shaped breasts, the triangle of the female pubic area, Broodthaers's mussels, the grapes from "The Seasons," zigzagging lines, bubble-like clouds based on those of Ferdinand Hodler, and small grids. These components are augmented by more recent motifs, such as the walking stick belonging to Balthus's sleeping girl and kitschy blue ribbons from Daniel Seghers's still lifes. What we have here is an entire concentrated cast of "expressive actors," culturally relevant forms of expression that Koether has imported into her painting over the years and duly subjected to repeated transfigurations. In addition, this diverse array of elements is woven into a dynamic, shimmering, flesh-colored tangle of lines intended

to denote vitality—further accentuated by iridescent, pointedly artificial tonal effects.

The entire complex of works rehearses "fictions" of a phantasmal encounter between bodies from art history and (mass) media, as well as an "inversion of the sexes" not unlike the postulation Régis Michel made in his provocative 2000 Louvre exhibition, *Posséder et détruire*, which confronted Western art history with a radical counterreading.[17] Koether reproduces individual pages from Michel's catalogue in her booklet accompanying *Zodiac Nudes*, thus taking up his reinterpretation of art as characterized by misogyny, male violence, and oppression. Against this Michel juxtaposes "fictions critiques" that explore perverse sexualities and ambiguous gender identity in art. In contrast, the ambivalent expressive vehicles in Koether's paintings are generated by the principle of metamorphosis that references Poussin's *Narcissus* and *Empire of Flora* (1631) (reproduced in the booklet as part of a newspaper article titled "Landschaft und Leidenschaft" ["Landscape and Passion"]). The transformation thus becomes a productive process through which Koether translates a male-dominated tradition in painting into a female or ambiguously gender-nonspecific visual language. Like Michel, she challenges us through her mutations and transfigurations, but she also forces us through the recurring viewer-within-the-painting strategy, which "arrests our gaze," to immerse ourselves visually in the painting, and generates a reciprocal process wherein looking at and being looked at obtains between the picture and the active viewer. As a result, the paintings themselves take on the status of "expressive actors."[18]



Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski), *The Mountain*, 1936–37.
Oil on canvas, 98 × 144 inches (248.9 × 365.8 cm)

Constellations

However, the reference to the zodiac in the title of the exhibition also indicates that far from being an aleatory free-for-all of associations and superimpositions invoking everything and everyone in a punky cacophony of jostling motifs, the show is about constellations of figures ascribed to specific spatial and semantic structures, in the same way that animal symbols are ascribed to the zodiac and the Wheel of the Year.[19] Accordingly, Koether points out in an interview with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh that the compositional field of "The Seasons" is fairly controlled, in keeping with the dimensions and composition of Poussin's painting. She states that she was particularly interested in adopting Poussin's precise pictorial structuring. But unlike his paintings with "minor emotional inserts," she instead wanted to amplify emotional expression and lend it the kind of weight assigned to the strict pictorial structure in Poussin's work.[20] Based on Clark's description of the paintings, Koether describes Poussin's paintings as "practical, psychological and historical … montages" and, as such, translates them into new configurations.[21] Although the interwoven pictorial structures are palimpsestic, allowing one to "live out one's very own 'Délir[e] d'interprétation' (Breton)," as Koether once stated in 2000 in her notes,[22] the superimpositions–described here as phantasmal–do not arise from spontaneous decisions. Koether uses her art historical models as a strict grid or scaffolding on which she builds her compositional field, which determines the whole formation from the outset. It is within this formation, then, that she allows her expressive actors to "perform" in ever new layers. Thus, in "winter" painting (*The Seasons IV*) the precisely measured and transferred configuration of figures within the story is still visible as a scaffolding of yellow, red, and blue daubs of paint, and Poussin's diagonal bolt of lightning, this time a straight beam, rends the painting in two in exactly the same spot.

However, all the figures and formations added to the structure of Poussin's painting—e.g., the black circles and swirling lines, the garlands and the back of a cat/viewer—are also present in the preliminary pencil, crayon, or pastel sketch. Ultimately, only microstructures vary in the production process, and this variation appears primarily in the iridescent, glittering colors and the (chiefly red) articulation of individual sections with Liquin, which lends the paintings a translucent, diaphanous, skin-like surface. The "corporality" and expressivity of Koether's painting thus develops through a strictly analytical process involving calculated configurations of expressive tropes that are constantly mediated to reveal their "playback" and transmission.

Thus, the repetition of pictorial elements, structures, and entire series (such as "The Seasons," which she has made various versions of, based on the model of Poussin's variations of the "Seven Sacraments") becomes the fundamental process in Koether's painting.[23] In addition to the doubling-up of pictures within pictures and the insertion of viewers within the painting, there are also peripheral zones painted into her work. In the "Berliner Schlüssel" cycle these framings occasionally take the form of naturalistically rendered metal brackets in the corners of the paintings. In case of the paintings with applied materials from "The Seven Sacraments" series, actual hardware-store brackets are physically integrated into the work.

Koether also frequently appropriates works with structural compositional framings—ranging from her translations of two

Jutta Koether, *Zodiac Nudes*, 2016. Artist's book

147, 148 self-portraits by Poussin to her own self-portraits *Berliner Schlüssel #13* and *#14* to her interest in the composition and framing of a Pompeii mural at the Metropolitan Museum. These framings become the repositories for all the inserted figures, the constitutive material from the group of works, including
143, 144, 145 the bolt of lightning and the self-portraits (*Berliner Schlüssel #9, 10, 11*).

The painted garland is another pictorial element that visually binds the texture of these "expressive actors," be it within a (specific) compositional field or across a series of related panels distributed in an exhibition space[24]: the triptych *Embrace/ Étreinte/ Umarmung, I, II, III*, from 2012, is a variation of a painting in the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) misattributed to Poussin. In this instance, the garland functions in such a way that the three canvases on individual slabs of glass[25] mounted on concrete pedestals can only fit visually when viewed from a particular angle in the room. Each canvas repeats motifs, such as the Hermes figure or wreaths, but the motifs are incorporated into new respective layers, whereby Koether references a publication that documents the restoration of the original painting, including the removal of overpainted layers and the discovery of individual pictorial components such as Hermes's phallus. She reflects the "negotiating status" of the painting in the trebling of the picture, which is not recognized by Poussin scholars as an authentic Poussin but is fetishized as such in the MASP collection. Koether, not without humor, presents her own methods of appropriating and fetishizing previous conceptions and, in the dissection and duplication of canvases, demonstrates the abiding principle behind all her grouped works: the goal is not painting as a "quiescent subject" but as a possible "threat scenario," in which the status of the picture is constantly challenged by new "expectations" from outside (such as language) or within (qualities it actually has), as she has put it when talking to Isabelle Graw.[26] Like all of Koether's paintings, the triptych *Embrace/ Étreinte/ Umarmung, I, II, III* does not embody a comprehensive "figure," but instead makes painting palpable as an open form of "figuration" in a continually fractured mode divided between alienation and authenticity.[27]

Making "the Other" One's Own

This is also apparent in Koether's process of appropriation, which constitutes both a deconstruction and an affirmation of existing works. Like T. J. Clark, she talks about the process of "overaffirmation" as an experiment in the search for a complete and contemplative response to a painting.[28] This implies a response to kitsch and cliché—not for the purpose of parodying a deliberately tasteless "bad painting," but to probe the expressive potential of the cliché itself.

Accordingly, Koether's layerings and configurations are not geared toward the fragmentation, confiscation, deconstruction, or recoding of images practiced by the so-called Pictures generation in the 1970s and 1980s to confront cultural and social alienation through the reappropriation of pictures.[29] Instead, drawing on an active interest in the appropriation discourse and practices that shaped the art scene in Cologne during the 1980s, as well as the New York circles that Koether frequented with increasing regularity at the beginning of the 1990s, she forged her own path. This entailed firmly embracing a fascination with the work being appropriated, an attitude precluded by the dogmatic discourse of appropriation art. In this particular regard Koether's painting is much more closely aligned to that of Martin Kippenberger than to other New York colleagues, whose approaches are more eye-catching and neo-expressionist (and therefore detested by left-wing art criticism), such as David Salle, Julian Schnabel, and George Condo, or those who cynically exaggerate the reification and spectactularization of art, such as Jeff Koons.[30] Neither the male gestures of annexation nor the cynicism nor, indeed, the purely deconstructive claim of appropriation discourse provides Koether with a useful model. In contrast, the approach she is pursuing is one shared with recent appropriation-art revisionists[31]: in Koether's case, appropriation becomes a case of veritably "making it her own," whereby "it" means the alien, the other (and not, per materialist discourse, something alienated that has to be reappropriated). In the process, she exposes the fiction in the demand for a purely critical, deconstructive appropriation. Koether instead attaches importance to the psychological, social, and visual power with which a painting by Poussin, or the emotionally charged pathos formula of a hero or heroine, is endowed, and demonstrates that although she cannot marshal it completely, she can make them her own as an "affective import." As a result, her methods of appropriation are not one-sided expropriations, but a symmetrical process in which her preexisting models can "beam" the artist.[32] It is not just a case of her taking possession of these painterly templates; she too is "possessed" by them and delivers herself to them accordingly.

This process also holds for the stereotypical expressive figures she imports from popular culture, whose gender coding and

Top: Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape during a Thunderstorm with Pyramus and Thisbe*, 1651. Oil on canvas, 75 3/16 × 107 7/8 inches (191 × 274 cm)
Bottom: Nicolas Poussin, *L'Hiver ou Le Déluge*, 1660–64. Oil on canvas, 46 7/16 × 63 inches (118 × 160 cm)

Installation view, *Embrace/ Étreinte/ Umarmung, I–III*, Bienal de São Paulo, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 2012

commercialization are revealed or overwritten through Koether's manipulation. However, while acknowledging the inherent kitsch in cliché, considering it a necessary condition of painting, which is itself part of a mediatized world, Koether also decides to "cut into communications and networks" by creating a new form of encounter between viewer and picture.[33] The sheer extent to which her quest for such contact derives from a painterly appropriation of clichéd figuration becomes apparent in the group of works titled "Sovereign Women," based on media images of Maria Callas, Kylie Minogue, and Peaches, among others. This project is also in keeping with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "body without organs," in particular its focus on pure "sensation."[34] Koether's development of her own brand of "sovereign" painting in this sense focuses initially on the "sovereign" herself, the heroine of the pop-culture motif. The corporeality of her expressive art in turn is pitched between autonomous masquerade, mediatized spectacle, and genuine tragedy. By exaggerating the masking and manipulation of time-honored female poses in shimmering red, almost unbearably kitschy paintings full of expressive emblems—such as Hodler's clouds, apple-shaped breasts, smileys, effulgent bundles of light beams, and animated wavy lines—Koether's painting allows the body of the painting itself to emerge as the resistant residue of cliché.

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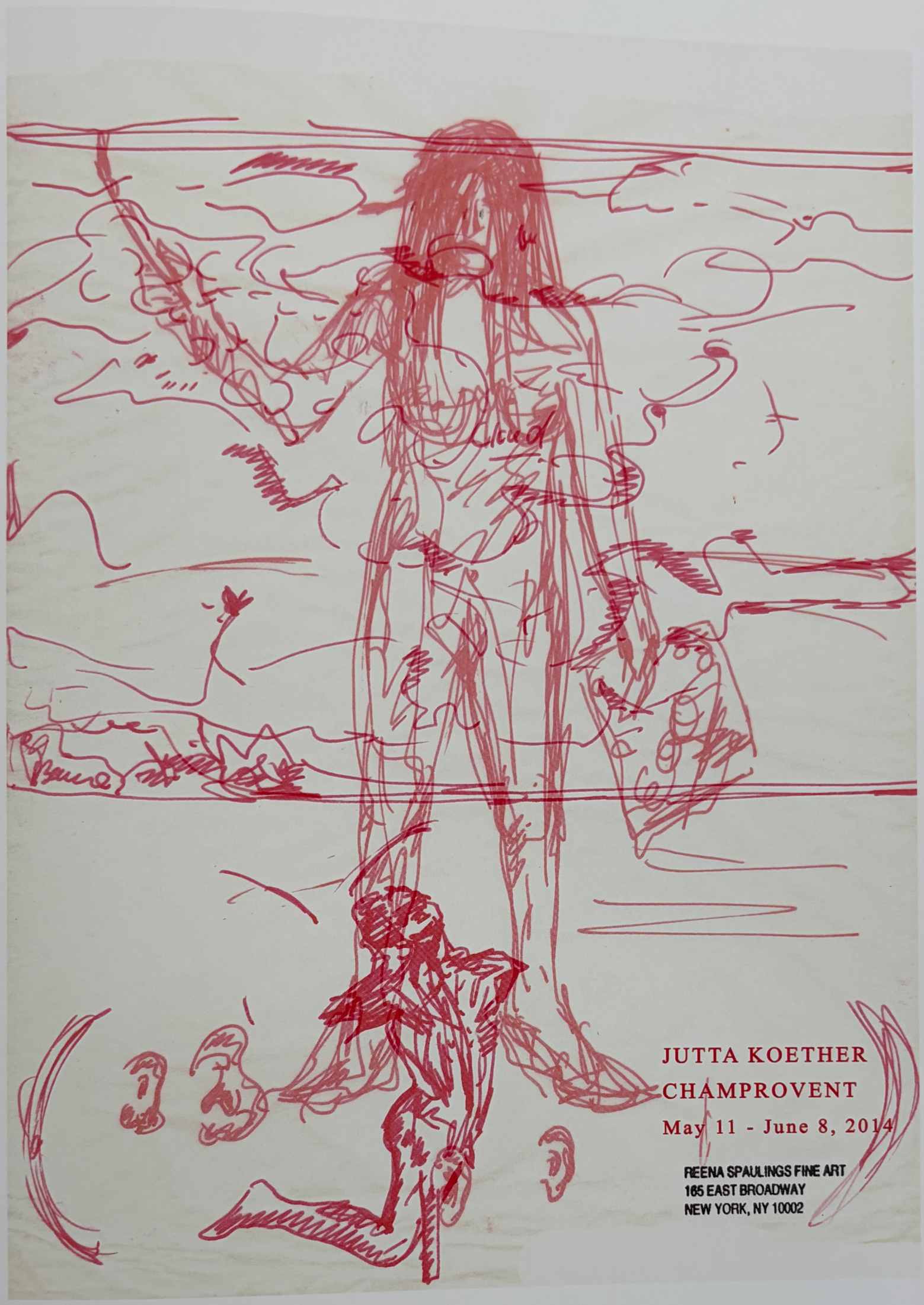
This kind of painting is also "sovereign," inasmuch as it eludes description in its enigmatic configurations of appropriated figures and patterns of campy symbols. It seems as though Koether is searching for the kind of visual configurations that, as T. J. Clark identified, are notoriously difficult to capture in words. It is in the very "elusiveness" or "resistance" of painting that he recognizes painting's ethical or even political point.[35] Koether's appropriations preserve their "otherness"; they insist on their "eccentricity" and their ineffability, and through this they generate an equally appealing and repellent visual effect. Thus, Koether's allegorical compositional fields counter the "expressive fallacy" that Hal Foster identified in the fact that "subjectivity is no less exempt from reification and fragmentation than objective reality itself."[36] By yielding to outside "expressive actors," to their kitsch and enigmatic "proactivity," Koether's paintings withhold their own consumability and attempt to remove affect—which has become a productive force in today's globalized capitalist order—from the complicity of commercial exploitation.

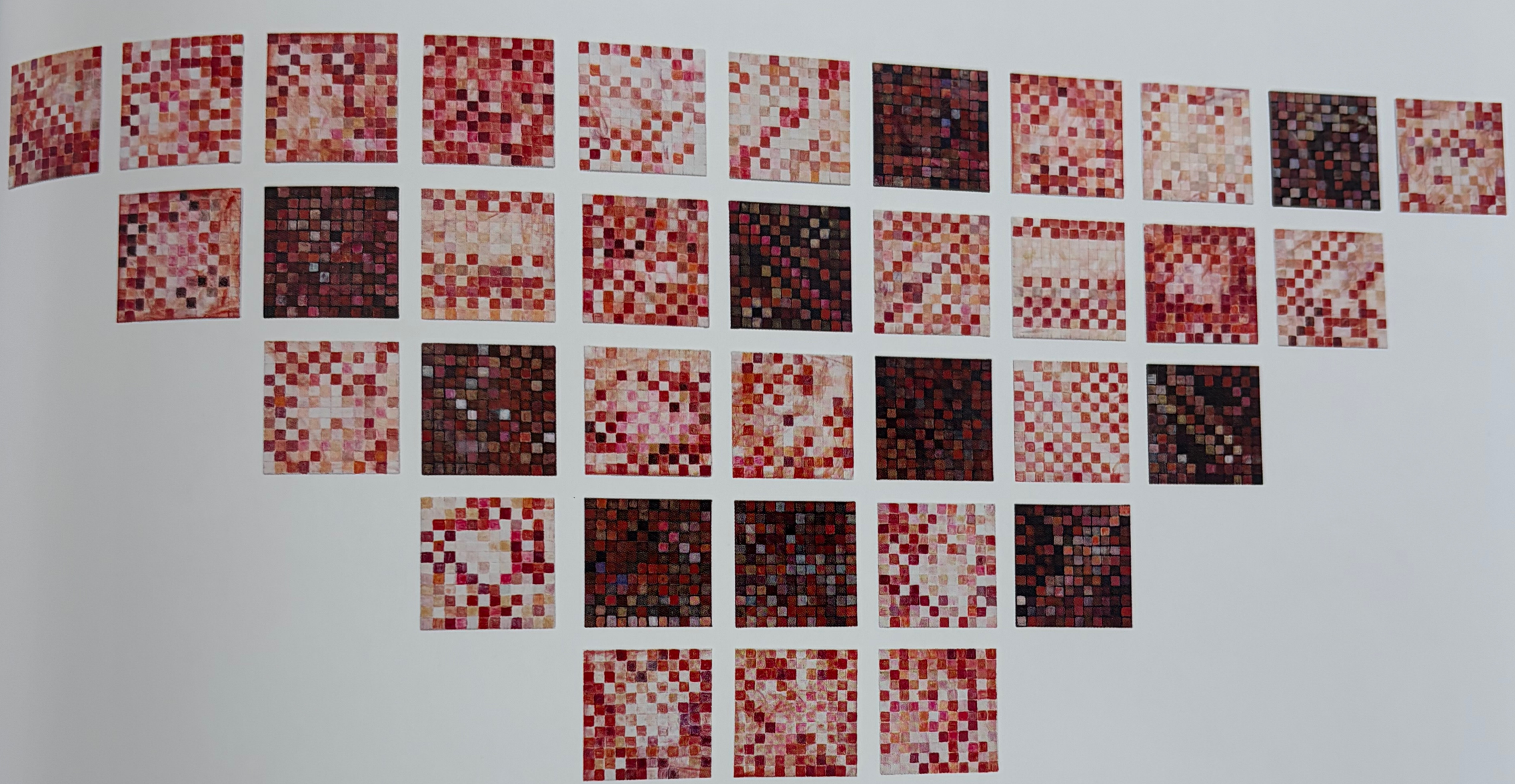
NOTES

1. Jutta Koether in conversation with the author, Berlin, September 2017. I am grateful to Koether for the opportunity to talk to her in great detail about her work, and for her generous responses to my repeated follow-up questions in our subsequent email exchange.
2. Cf. Isabelle Graw, "Classics of Modernism: On Jutta Koether's Treatment of Canonic Painters," in *Jutta Koether*, exh. cat. (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2006), 122–27.
3. Cf. Koether's own statements on the subject: "At that time my intention was to mutilate or charge pre-existing classical models in the wrong way and now I've returned to the specific palette I used in the 1980s. You could say that I was shouting 'I am this red!' while simultaneously mutilating or charging those classical paintings wrongly. This preoccupation derived from what was going on around me because the approaches or the discourse I was involved in typically gave rise to affirmative gestures.... My genuine interest in the old classics is now more historical: how do I approach history, the courses it takes and what painting meant and still means today? How do I use these things?" Isabelle Graw and Jutta Koether, "Painting Abuse—ein Gespräch zwischen Jutta Koether und Isabelle Graw" ("Painting Abuse—A Conversation between Jutta Koether and Isabelle Graw"), *Lerchenfeld* 10 (May 2011): 21.
4. Martin Prinzhorn, "Transgressing the Rules for Transgression," in *Jutta Koether*, 40–43.
5. T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2006).
6. Similarly, she discovered Botticelli's painting for herself by reading Georges Didi-Huberman. Cf. Jutta Koether, "Anschaulich werden. Von manischem Materialismus" ("Becoming Graphic: On Manic Materialism"), *Texte zur Kunst*, May 2008, 196–201. In particular, she refers to Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus. Nudité, rêve, cruauté* (Paris: 1999); Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée* (*Painting Incarnate*) (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).
7. Sam Lewitt, "Pyrrhic Victories. Sam Lewitt on Jutta Koether at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York," *Texte zur Kunst*, September 2009, 145–47.
8. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," *October*, no. 130 (Autumn 2009): 125–34.
9. Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, 83.
10. Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, 83–84.
11. Jutta Koether, "Mad Garland," in *Art and Subjecthood. The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, eds. Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsch (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 92.
12. For a more detailed interpretation of "The Seasons," see *Jutta Koether: Seasons and Sacraments*, exh. cat. (Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts; Bristol: Arnolfini, 2013), in particular the essays by Jay Sanders "Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter," 13–25, and Michael Sanchez and Jeff Nagy, "Untimely Mediations," 37–54. On the meaning of "The Seasons" as "post-seasonal temporalities of distribution," see Michael Sanchez, "After the Seasons," in *Art in the Periphery of the Center*, eds. Christoph Behnke, Cornelia Kastelan, Valérie Knoll, and Ulf Wuggenig (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 526–41.
13. Cf. Bruno Latour's definition of actants/actors, which specifically interests Koether: Bruno Latour, *The Politics of Nature* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2001).
14. Bruno Latour, "The Berlin Key or How to Do Things with Words," in *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, ed. P. M. Graves-Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 10–21.
15. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71: "... and so these implements, according to our definition, are actors, or more precisely, participants in the course of action waiting to be given a figuration."
16. Invitation to the exhibition at the Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich, in 2008.
17. Régis Michel, *Posséder et détruire. Stratégies sexuelles dans l'art d'Occident* (*Possess and Destroy: Sexual Strategies in Occidental Art History*) (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000).
18. This becomes evident via the way the paintings are positioned in respective exhibition spaces, when the front and back of the works are visible because they have been mounted on glass plates or when some have been hung back-to-back or even—as is the case of the self-portrait *Berliner Schlüssel #14* in the Galerie Daniel Buchholz in Berlin—mounted between two sliding doors and thus acting as a barricade.
19. Cf. also Isabelle Graw's short text in the booklet accompanying the exhibition *Zodiac Nudes*, Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Berlin, 2016.
20. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "A Conversation with Jutta Koether," *October*,

no. 157 (Summer 2016): 31.
21. Graw and Koether, "Painting Abuse," 22.
22. Jutta Koether's notes on the back of a letter from PONTON Intelligent Media, May 25, 2000 (*JK-A_FILE01*).
23. Cf. also Koether's reflection of doublings in *Double Session* as part of the "The Seasons" and "The Seven Sacraments" series that refer to Derrida's eponymous essay: Jacques Derrida, "The Double Session," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 187–316. See also *Jutta Koether. Seasons and Sacraments*.
24. For interest in the garlands and their transition to independence, cf. also Jenny Jaskey, "WTF," in *Jutta Koether. Paper N°2* (Berlin: PRAXES Center for Contemporary Art, 2013), 1–8, http://www.praxes.de/papers/Paper-2-Jutta-Koether.pdf. Cf. also Graw and Koether, "Painting Abuse," 81–94.
25. Koether had already experimented with the presentation of paintings on panes of glass in 2006 in her *Fantasia Colonia* series, although in that instance by being able to recycle existing panes due to limited financial means. The presentational form was then deliberately used in follow-up projects, such as *New Yorker Fenster* (New York Windows) and realized at the Museu de arte de São Paulo with pedestals from Lina Bo Bardi's original famous exhibition display, which has now been revived.
26. Graw and Koether, "Painting Abuse," 22.
27. On the relationship between "Gestalt" (figure) and "Gestaltung/Carnation d'un corps" (figuration/incarnation), see Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée*, 131. On the divided mode of this form of painting and its take on subjectivity, see also Achim Hochdörfer, "A Hidden Reserve: Painting from 1958 to 1965," *Artforum*, February 2009, 158.
28. Koether, "Anschaulich werden," 197.
29. See, for example, Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October*, no. 8 (Spring 1979): 75–88; Crimp, "Appropriating Appropriation," *Image Scavengers*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1983); Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October*, no. 12 (Spring 1980): 67–86; Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition," *October*, no. 18 (Autumn 1981): 47–66. See also Jan Verwoert, "Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art," *Art & Research. A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 1–7.
30. For more detail on the New York art scene in the 1980s, see Alison Pearlman, *Unpacking Art of the 1980s* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Dan Cameron, ed., *East Village USA*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005); Douglas Eklund, ed. *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009).
31. Rahel Jaeggi, "Appropriation Requires Foreignness: Thoughts on the Concept of Appropriation in Marx," *Texte zur Kunst*, June 2002, 60–69; Johanna Burton, "Subject to Revision," *Artforum*, October 2004, 259–305; Isabelle Graw, "Dedication Replacing Appropriation: Fascination, Subversion, and Dispossession in Appropriation Art," in *Louise Lawler and Others*, ed. Philipp Kaiser, exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz; Basel: Kunstmuseum Basel, 2004), 45–6.
32. Graw and Koether, "Painting Abuse," 22.
33. Cf. Koether's declared intent: "to cut into communications and networks," in Jutta Koether, "Mad Garland," 82.
34. See Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon. Logique de la sensation* (Paris Éditions de la Différence: 1981); cf. also Manuela Ammer, "'How's My Painting?' (Judge Me, Please, Don't Judge Me)," in *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, exh. cat. (Munich: Museum Brandhorst / Delmonico Books, Prestel; Vienna: Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2015), 85–101.
35. Clark, *The Sight of Death*, 184.
36. Hal Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy" (1983), in Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), 75.



Jutta Koether, exhibition flyer for *Champrovent*, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York, 2014



PAINTING MORE NAKED THAN NAKED

Tonio Kröner

Jutta Koether, *Tate BP Bacon Balthus PdF*, 2015. Oil on canvas, diptych, each: 87 × 67 inches (220 × 170 cm)

PICTURE *I am independent of either of you. I am preparing to set out on life of my own.*
PAINTER *I forbid it!*
PICTURE *Fortunately you are powerless. Already the opacity of my pigment is ebbing, my oil is yellowing. I am beginning my long collaboration with time. My course is predestined.*
PAINTER *Does it end in glory, the national gallery?*
APPLE *The municipal rubbish heap?*
PICTURE *I shall keep my secret.*
—Lawrence Gowing[1]

The outlines of drapes, fruit, a jug, and a bowl are printed in black on a primed white canvas. The informed historical eye sees what appears to be a Cézanne; the aficionado recognizes a smaller, mirror-image rendering of his *Apples and Oranges* (ca. 1899), which hangs in the Musée d'Orsay. Luminous orange, red, violet, pink, gold, and silver spill over the outlines. Painterly gestures occasionally scrape along the emphatic black guardrails or hug them in a glazed arc. These gestures intensify the determination and spatial layout of the printed lines. Acrylic paint collects and coagulates into crimson-pinkish bruises within individual outlines. Heedless of contours, other free radicals streak across the canvas.

Does the darkish line that runs from the upper-right corner across the "apples and oranges" toward the middle of the picture (where it bifurcates downward and to the left toward the next sets of spheres) lock together the erogenous zones within this ready-made still life? Not to mention the spheres: the preprinted circles, the only closed forms on the canvas, have been modeled in fleshy red. But as what? Are they apples, bloodshot eyes, breasts? Their dominance is self-evident as the rhythmic flow of the paint transforms the arm of the chair in the lower-right quarter of the canvas—over which the fabric is draped and on which the fruit is sitting—into another composed yet pulsating organic circular form. Finally, glazed metallic paint in iridescent gold and silver washes over the whole canvas like spume. The transparency and sparkling pigmentation of this final layer of paint almost defies capture, but it actually seems to cleave to the painted gestures. The markings of color inside and over the printed outlines constitute the background of this flood of paint.

Has there ever been a more merciless encounter of banality and painterly pathos than in Jutta Koether's painting *JXXXA-PPR01-5* (2008)? Is there a more real support imaginable for painting today than this ready-made canvas preprinted with the outlines from a well-known Cézanne still life? 132

According to Meyer Schapiro's reading, Paul Cézanne, equipped with godlike surety and the stability of the desk strategist, found something in his apples, i.e., in the format of the still life, that proved impossible to realize via a human model: the ability to offer "an infinite nuancing of tones on the small rounded forms."[2] This scene, once staged in the artist's studio, is now available to buy in a radically attenuated form: as an industrially manufactured, preprinted template, which facilitates painting as a game played with color that never has to confront a human body (or indeed a piece of fruit). Manufactured by Reeves and used by Koether as the starting point for a series of works, these canvases decidedly target an adult market. Apart from the printed canvas, which Koether used for this particular painting, a set of this kind also includes a selection of paints, an instruction booklet, and a reproduction of the original painting as a template, all three of which Koether disregards.

By using a hobbyist painting set for her work, Koether is continuing what Andy Warhol touched on in his "Do It Yourself" painting series from 1962. Warhol enlarged the banal scale of paint-by-numbers paintings to that of "real" paintings. Painting as a hobby was thus elevated to the level of art, the sublime expression of the artist equated with the mechanical filling in of areas on the canvas according to the supplied numerical code. The simplicity of Koether's template motifs—bowls of fruit on a cloth—is, however, no match for the comparatively spectacular banality of the flower and landscape motifs Warhol deployed. The visual appeal of her motifs is generated primarily by the name *Cézanne* and his stature in the collective mind of canonized images. Reeves-brand Cézannes are an expression of modern art's victory parade to the heart of Western mass culture. Further, they represent the concomitant cultural transition from a disciplinary social regime that lays down the rules for the subject in every mode of life to an indirectly controlling one that encourages the subject toward creative autonomy and self-management in keeping with the model of the "modern artist."[3] The closed fields, replete with numbers in the classic paint-by-numbers mode, are replaced by an open, yet equally rigid, set of outlines. The purpose is not to fill in the shapes according to a numerical color code, but to paint "freely" using the color palette provided in response to the instructions and original template.

Contrary to the possible intention of her series, Koether by no means views this development as a pretext for salvaging the achievements of modernist painting since Cézanne (the sublimating power of "pure" form) or Warhol (the critical relationship between high and popular culture). Nor, indeed, does she condemn its shortcomings or expose the endemic problems that have existed since day one. Her painting doesn't pursue this sort of agenda; it has nothing to lose and therefore nothing to salvage.[4] Far from it: over and in the schematic outlines of this gentrified[5] visual language, she reiterates and varies subtle modes of painting from canvas to canvas. She adheres to the Reeves-kit imperative and simultaneously subdues it in the extreme visual turbulence of her characteristic red palette and gestures, a radical brand of "Do It Yourself" painting.

In three paintings immediately following the serial treatment of the Cézanne ready-mades, Koether stretched sealed but unprimed canvases on stretchers of identical dimensions. On the at once cryptic and yet tellingly titled painting *Jxxx-PR01 (#10) (the imagination has no sense of the inappropriate)* (2008), 136

as in the other two works, she draws the outlines of the same Cézanne apple still life, for which reproductions of the original and the previously painted prefab canvases serve as templates. Koether pits the classical craft of making a preliminary drawing and (subsequently) transferring the compositional sketch onto the canvas against industrially manufactured, preprinted outlines, whose connotations are described earlier.

The fluid line between autonomous composition, manual gesture, and imported artistic and nonartistic motifs has been integral to Koether's painting production from the very beginning. For example, a series of her works from 1985 is based on excerpts from paintings by Piero della Francesca, whereas her large-format paintings from the first half of the 1990s incorporate, among other motifs, traced figures from pornographic magazines and drawings by Pierre Klossowski.

The difference between *Jxxx-PR01 (#10) (the imagination has no sense of the inappropriate)* and *JXXXA-PPR01-5* is subtle: the motif's outlines come less to the fore, and thus the painting's support gains presence to the same extent that the painterly markings acquire a commensurate sense of visual independence. This intensifies the contrast between the decidedly undetermined tonal markings and the template's construction, perspective, and subject matter. The gestures develop a life of their own with regard to motif and support, again in the self-contained forms of the "apples" in particular. While the ongoing tussle between painterly gestures and preprinted outlines seems to have found a point of quiet by deforming the chair arm into a sphere, the central pieces of fruit in the later work transcend their drawn outlines and ease themselves out of the bowl, their spatial and narrative setting. Inasmuch as the flow of color wrestles less with the outlines than with its support and its flatness, the apples are arranged alongside one another in flat circles approximating—in dialogue with free-floating markings—pure form.

In tandem with the circular forms that grace many of Koether's paintings in the guise of apples, discs, little heads, spheres, suns or cells, the grid represents a second archetype in her visual armory. The "Bruised Grids" series, initiated at the same time as the Cézanne copies and still ongoing, finally consolidates the grid motif as an established component of visual organization in
119 Koether's practice. The series of drawings *10. Dezember 2000 – 6. Mai 2002* (2002) provides the central reference point for these painted grids. The 512 colored crayon drawings that she made on a daily basis during this period make use of another industrially manufactured template: reams of paper printed with blank grids comprise squares designed for practicing Chinese logograms. Again, (free) markings vie with preprinted boundaries, in this instance with explicitly educational overtones. Different from the Cézanne contours, the grids are printed in light red lines. And the crayon marks do not appear to be scrapping it out with the individual boxes—instead, they seem to find some kind of comfort in the very act of filling them in. Expression stays well within set boundaries. Nevertheless, it does register a plethora of undetermined variables in the prescribed, mechanical act of filling in the squares, in their specific colors, hatching, and repetition of the line.

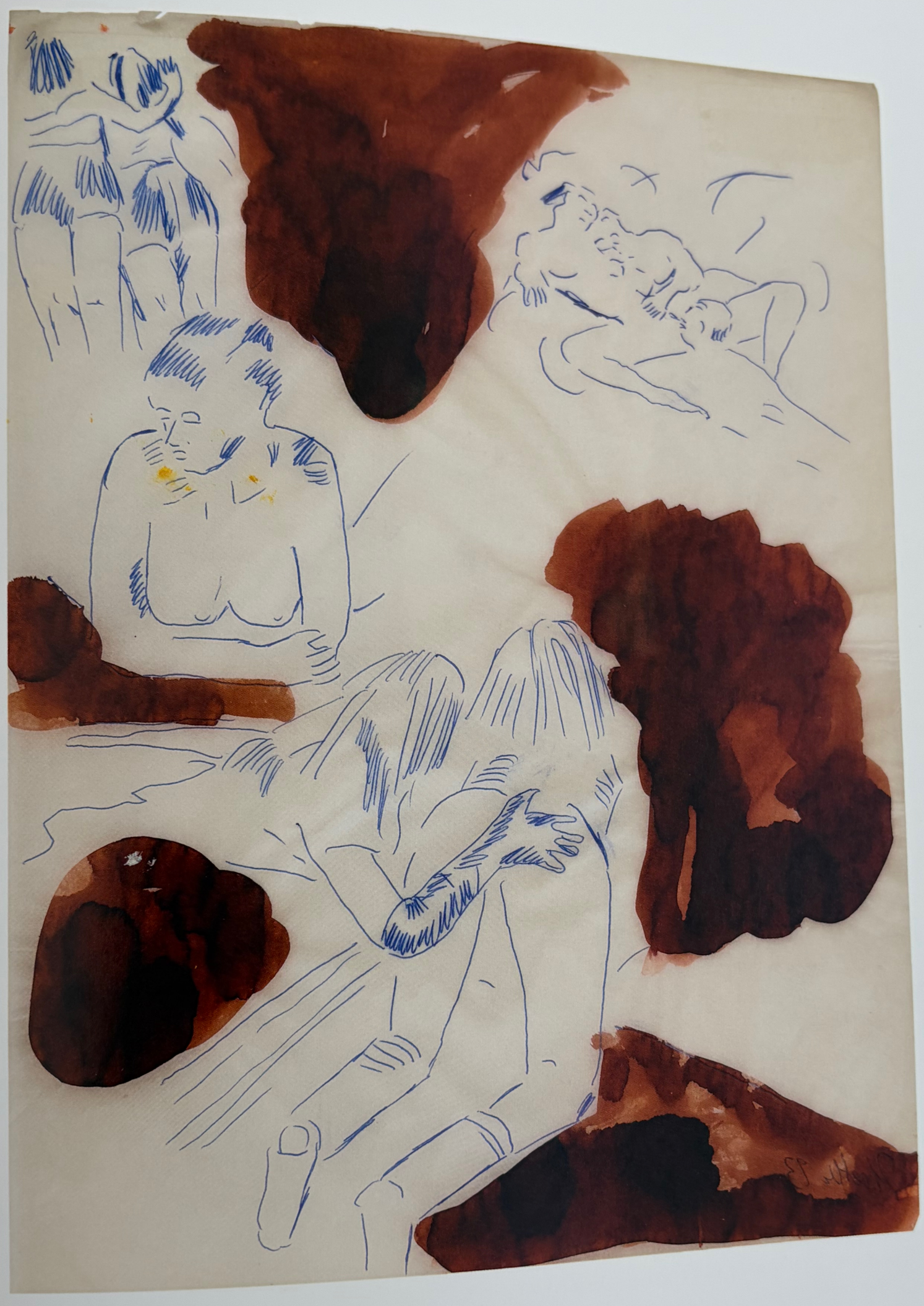
Koether's "Demonic Options," an alternative title for the "Bruised Grids" in which a twelve-inch-square canvas is divided into one-inch squares, explores the surprising variability of the checkerboard in painting. In one variation, the outlines of the grid have been drawn in red pen on a white canvas and alternate 133
squares are either left blank or filled in with shades of orange, red, pink, and brown. However, the rhythm is interrupted by two settings. On the one hand, supposedly "dark" squares are only glazed with color and still tonally approximate to the light-colored ground. On the other, bright-orange squares, in lieu of what should be "white" squares, fluctuate in this dark/light arrangement. This transfiguration of the relationship between the figure and the ground tends to emphasize the fragility of the outlines rather than transgress them. A similar instance of unassuming interference occurs in sheets from *10. Dezember 2000 – 6. Mai 2002*, in which two squares painted in the same color adjoin one another.

In a process that Koether refers to as "bruising," a transparent acrylic finish is boldly applied across the canvases. Red and metallic paints are worked into this substance. The procedure seems to pay little or no recognizable heed to the layout of the grid, using it instead as more of a background, and further compressing its arrangement. Following the overpainting of gestures with metallic paint in Koether's ready-made Cézannes, the grid—the epitome of constructed, sharply delineated, and formal painting—serves as the ground for a glimmering skein of color that has no truck with boundaries. Do grids ever dream of bruises?

*

Koether's series of Cézanne still lifes and "Bruised Grids" materialize in the moment when painting is deemed "beside itself."[6] Painting has been pressurized to legitimate itself once more in the wake of the changes coined as the digital revolution and the massively accelerated forms of visual production and consumption that emerged during the 2000s. At the same time, it proved itself as a *dispositif* to be extremely lucrative, resistant, and capable of survival.[7] This is not the primary context in which Koether's painting practice experiments with the detritus and fringes of the debates surrounding modernist painting and visual vocabulary to capture characteristic functions and qualities of the medium. But the renewed challenge can no longer be ignored when Koether's contribution to the 2016 anthology *Painting beyond Itself* states that painting needs to be refitted, to have alterations of all kinds made—needs a veritable tailor's workshop for painting—but without resorting to any standardized patterns for necessary repairs.[8]

However, healing the patient isn't one of Koether's concerns. Her canvas is cut differently and is more of an invitation to participate in an adventure involving emboldened seeing and thinking through the language of painting. Not to mention her calling for the most direct encounter possible with—and a decidedly



Jutta Koether, *Untitled*, 1993. Ballpoint pen and ink on paper, 11 ¾ × 8 ¾ inches (30 × 22.5 cm)

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fragmented experience of—the twitching and screaming contradictions of the medium and its ultimate referencing of expression, appropriation of the world, and the human body. The sheer excess of Koether's concentration and shifting of painting, as well as her repeating and recollecting of previously painted pictures (by herself and others), imposes itself without regard; no category nor concept of modernist painting—still valid reference points to this day—emerges unscathed. But they are neither disqualified nor denounced.[9]

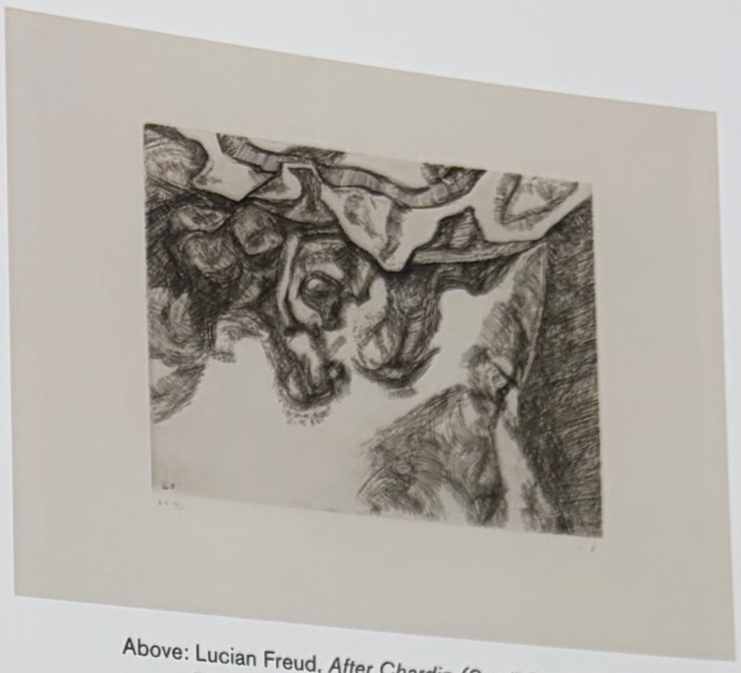
Koether was never under the spell of the myths of the great artist. She wasn't trained as an artist. Her academy was the music and pop-culture magazine *SPEX*, named after the punk band X-Ray Spex, and for which she worked as a writer from 1981, and as an editor from 1985, until 2000. Her studio practice was centered for long periods—and at times from financial necessity—in her apartment, on stages, and in shared studios. She actively introduces her knowledge as an artist and her references into the debate about her work by writing, teaching, and speaking publicly about painting. This perspective toward artistic practice and painting is based on Koether's emphatic reading of punk, which she had already encountered in the mid-1970s as an alternative myth of an adjuratory "no future" nihilism. As a reaction to the social climate at the time, experienced as crisis-ridden and hopeless after the "wild" 1960s, punk's "Nothing matters anymore" attitude opened up new vistas of freedom and equality, seeming to blur and neutralize institutional restrictions as well as gender and class divisions. The attitude of punk, in particular the self-empowerment of its "Do It Yourself" creed and ethos of "Everything can be done by everyone," epitomizes Koether's attitude toward painting.[10] Virtuosity and knowledge are placed in the service of intensity, excitement, and tonality. From this it follows that the focus of engagement with the world seems to reside in being an emotional resource for acting at the mercy of the alluring forces of chaos—not for a pacifying, restricting understanding of the world.[11]

In this sense, punk is also a reaction to the all-embracing, impenetrable codification of life in the 1970s. Assertive punk takes on the semiotic conglomerate that goes by the name of the world and plays with it as a raw material, as Kathy Acker puts it:

> For the poet, the world is word. Words. Not that precisely. Precisely: the world and the words fuck each other.[12]

And just like the (punk) poetess, the painter also enters the underworld of words. There are no solutions in this "beyond,"[13] where the denotations and the "unknowable"[14] nature of the world meet in struggle and tenderness; instead, there is experience of the contours of the present and options for action within them.

One recalls the idea of Antonin Artaud that decisively influenced both Koether's conceptual outlook as well as the theoretical thinking in the 1970s in general: cruelty is nothing but determination as such, that precise point at which the determined maintains its essential relation with the undetermined.[15] Artaud's



Above: Lucian Freud, *After Chardin (Small Plate)*, 2000. Etching, 6 1/16 × 8 inches (15.4 × 20.3 cm)
Opposite: Jutta Koether, *Demonic Options* (detail), 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 11¾ × 11¾ inches (30 × 30 cm)

concept of cruelty is not related to sadism or to blood and torn flesh. It demands to be understood in a broader sense, as a fundamental mode of thought with cosmological proportions. His cruelty is the merciless connection of all concepts and forms with a seething, undetermined inner force. The contours of any elucidating or descriptive words are unable to convey this "turmoil of life" to which the world and being in general are subject.[16] However, the theater, with its expression in space and corporeal language of gesture(s), intonation, sound, screams, rhythms, and objects, is able to get closer. This involves a paradoxical, oneiric language that attends to a hieroglyphic system with an internal aesthetic logic. Its modality is to realize fluid ideas, which by their very nature cannot be limited or even formally depicted. And it is precisely in the paradox of a systematic language, which makes the undetermined palpable, that imaginings of a passionate equation between purportedly discrete concepts, such as individual, society, and objects, can be experienced.[17]

The design of a reproducible language—that turns the "unknowableness" of words inside out and elevates them to symbols that can be experienced as myths—corresponds to Koether's ongoing engagement with the color red. To the same degree as Artaud's cruelty isn't about bloodshed, her red paintings don't represent a naturalistic approach to the body. In their role as paintings, they actually wrest red's mythical dimension from the word *red* itself, as well as from motifs depicted in this color. To quote Koether, "Red paintings don't show flesh and don't resemble flesh; rather they resemble little red army units, cells: if anything, bloody money rather than bloody flesh."[18] On the one hand, *red* as such doesn't exist: instead there are different shades, historically and geographically determined, in different tubes made by different manufacturers for a diverse clientele. On the other, *red* permeates extensive areas of human existence. Ranging from blood to lipstick to political activism, its varied associations make it very much an Artaudian sign.

Above: Lucian Freud, *David and Eli*, 2003–2004.
Oil on canvas, 64 × 68 ½ inches (162.5 × 174 cm)
Opposite: Jutta Koether, *Ear Freud Chardin* (detail), 2014.
Oil on canvas, 47 × 59 inches (199.4 × 149.9 cm)

Koether's entry into this beyond—this province beyond words—reads like a play in its own right: Mrs. Benway, Koether's alter ego since 1985, is the "other half" in a forced marriage with Dr. Benway, a recurring fictional character in William S. Burroughs's narrative universe. Dr. Benway is a perverse physician more interested in his surgical performance, conducted under the influence of narcotics and with dirty instruments, than in the well-being of his patients. His treatment of dirty things—bodies, drugs, knives, trash, and language—is laconic, close to caricature. At his side and under the spell of his alternative, unnatural language of behavior, Koether was able to come up with her own operations.[19] She was able to appropriate the concepts, motifs, and paint tubes of painting. The painting itself is the auditorium where she turns its innermost world inside out and suspends it across the surface of the canvas, itself a paradoxical surface, which is simultaneously defined by Koether as pure like an abstract and dirty like a Pop art painting.[20] Koether—who has become a kind of fictional character in her own right—has immersed herself in "a genuine physical language with signs, not words, as its root."[21]

*

Orange, brown, and pinkish-violet lines in oil pastel traverse the primed white canvas, retraced in sections with oil paint. In the process, shrill orange and a white that absorbs, smudges, and is colored by the pigments of the oil pastels solidify the paints like shoals in a river. Gold and the duality of its presence/absence wash over the format. In the left-hand section of the painting, there is a huddle of three concentric, compressed ovoid shapes not quite closed on the right-hand side. Traveling from the top-right corner to the bottom of the canvas, a line of paint congeals into a dark-violet/pink spot in its middle and, battling against the tide, seems to be preserving a semblance of recognizable form. The statement made by this marking has the effect of rendering the sum of the gestures to its left legible as a form in juxtaposition with the sparsely painted support of primed canvas to the right.

The swirling eddies of color in Koether's *Ear Freud Chardin* (2014) suddenly coalesce into the profile of a face in extreme close-up. The initial apparent randomness of the shapes and the swirl of paint now appears as facial orifices, an ear, an eye. The surface of the painting is virtually dominated by imagination, its marbled waves modeling form to the same degree that they dissolve it. Dislocations, fragmentation, and distortions are givens, and are neither feared nor brought into battle as critical artillery.

However, all this is not from Koether's imagination, at least not to any greater or lesser degree than her grid paintings or Cézanne still lifes. It is based on observation, though not of a model sitting for her, but by looking at images. It is the most recent realization so far of a visual tumult, a human ear in oils. It is the very ear that obscenely disrupts the contemplative calm in Jean-Siméon Chardin's *The Young Teacher* (1735–36), and which Lucian Freud memorialized in 2000 in his etching *After Chardin (Small Plate)*, which acted as a template for Koether. Mostly left naked and protruding from the rest of the body, the skin-shrouded bodily orifice called *ear* is an absolute receptor. Unlike the human eye, it cannot be closed. The ear knows nothing of painting, but is cognizant of the melody of words, clamor, whispering, stuttering, and the silence of the world. The world breaks into the body via the ear as an abstract intensity and simultaneously the body folds toward the world as ear.

Along with Cézanne, Artaud, and Dr. Benway, Lucian Freud is another prominent celestial body in Koether's painting cosmos. His painterly project is the pursuit of the body, specifically its subjugation by the environment and, to the same degree, the subjugation of the painting by the body—the intrusion of the material body and its gestures into the studio situation. He represents the complementary opposite of Cézanne's treatment of corporeality, its sublimation in the round apple. The fleshy presence of the life model, which had neutralized Cézanne's concentration on the formal questions of painting, forms the nub of Freud's physiology of painting. The crudity of his painterly treatment of bodies is all the more extreme given the fact that although life models sat for these paintings, they were viewed and treated graphically, just like plants, furniture, or animals. Staying with the picture: whereas in Cézanne's case every apple stays a particular apple, in Freud's studio everything becomes an apple and everything has to assert its place in and shape toward the world *as* apple. This strife-ridden ontology is characteristic of the second half of the twentieth century, of the search for some purchase in a world of post-catastrophic social and technological upheaval, one that renders the status of the "male" human more than a little fragile. (How many penises feature centrally in Freud's bodies and paintings, all stumbling through the messy confusion of the world? How often has the penis been generalized as the purported center of a fragmented body and an out-of-joint

language?) Freud integrates the dual aspect of the "unknowable," the nonhuman and the annihilating, into a male sense of being human in the extreme. In this way, his painterly operations aren't so far removed from the kind Dr. Benway performs:

> the surgeon deliberately endangers his patient, and then, with incredible speed and celerity, rescues him from death at the last possible split second …[22]

Koether's reimagining of Freud's incursions into the body of life-painting only serves to increase the patient's stress levels.
156 *Lucian David and Eli* (2014) uses Freud's *David and Eli* (2003–2004) as its template—David Dawson, Freud's studio assistant and model during the last twenty years of his life, and Eli, one of his whippets, are lying on a bed made with a white sheet, a yucca plant close by. Koether condenses the simultaneously fragile and delicate depiction in Freud's painting by retaining its height yet compressing its width to almost half the size of the original. As a result, the room, the bed, and the floor are tilted upright, which affords a top view parallel to the picture plane; the depicted body is hence lying beneath us frontally, as though on an operating table—we recall Cézanne's godlike perspective on his apples and Koether's radically planar depiction of her "Cézanne apples" in *Jxxx-PR01 (#10) (the imagination has no sense of the inappropriate)*.

As though in a pressure cooker, the situation in the studio is brought to a boil with an intensity resembling that of caricature; the stream of the imagination is turned fully on to produce a feverish whirlpool of monstrous proportions. The preparatory sketching is considerably bolder than in *Ear Freud Chardin* and encompasses a broader spectrum of colors and contrasts, ranging from orange, red, and pink to olive green. The drawing and oil painting, comprising short, fluid, and spare opaque markings, struggle to provide the outlines of the individual figures, to delineate space, and to stabilize the discrete components in their relational configurations. Once again, golden metallic paint highlights the depicted bodies as a kind of optical glimmering, but also shifts the floorboards and the negative space of the supine David to the visual foreground.

The doubling of the picture's corners in torrid red emphasizes the boundary aspect of the format and lends cohesion to the mise-en-scène, which it literally frames. The same intense red spews forth from David's gaping head, cut off at the top by the edge of the canvas. The face itself—Freud's preferred site for establishing identity between paint and the depicted world—has been rubbed with this most intense red pigment on the canvas. The flow and burn of the paint concentrates itself again into an outline in a deep-pink section on the right beneath the middle of the painting. This marking provides the viewer's eye with support, in the very position of the only visible leg of the bed frame on which the composition in Freud's painting balances. Unlike the original, this upright doesn't correlate to David's penis as a kind of visual rhyme. The latter is quite literally decentered and, as a crude shape, creates space for a rough triangle, itself a negative space completed by the position of his bent left leg.[23] The apples are also reprised. Two circles, David's breasts, are beacons of calm in the overall tonal hurly-burly. At second glance, and as a visual key via their referencing the rounded shoulder and knee joints, the heels and the back of the hand, they plot the coordinates of the human figure. Ultimately, the appearance of a checkerboard grid in the spot of the yucca's woven enclosure in Freud's painting helps to strike a balance once more between the fleshy signifiers and the continuum of repetitive decor and painterly surface.

Lucian David and Eli is a declaration of love to monstrous painting: to the enigmatic qualities of a practice full of riddles without solutions, a model visual arena rich in inherent interactions and tensions, and the spatial scope for an alogical, closed surface. The vigor with which this visceral expression is projected outward, enmeshed as it is with the flow of the world, effectively connects the dots between Cézanne's still lifes, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, Dr. Benway's operating table, Freud's portraits, and Koether's painting.

The almost square painting *More Naked than Naked* (2016)[24] 163
is a programmatic summing up of sorts: the overall flow of marks oscillates hazily between drawing and painting, contained by painted frames in the respective corners of the canvas. The flow gathers in the outlines of a naked body and pools into a face of intense materiality. At the same time, these eddies of color are countered by a contiguous grid in the top-left corner that is composed of separate individual markings. The grid itself abstracts a curved line, which has actually been painted on the other side of the canvas. A line in the shape of a walking stick right next to it subverts the painterly gesture once more. The stick provides depth of field as it disappears into and emerges from a bank of color. This is promptly annulled by the flatness of two crossed lines in the upper-right corner. Koether has painted an apple sphere in the lower-left corner diagonally opposite the cross. This in turn corresponds to the approximate triangular surface formed as a negative space between the human's left heel, lower thighs, and pubic area—and therefore his penis, too, which is shunted out of and marginalized by this space. At the same time, this "empty" triangle mirrors the densely painted face, its chin an inverted apex pointing downward. Furthermore, the style of the apple, or the pupil at the center of this orb, lends the discrete dots on the man's chest a larger-than-life, spectral presence. Thus, the act of looking itself paves the way for the dynamic relationship between even the most minimal painterly details in the picture.

The program of a kind of painting that is more naked than naked is inevitably and decidedly symbolic. With it, Koether has laid down and simultaneously expanded a fundamental genealogy of modern expression. This program is closely associated with the limitations of words; it shares their problems and, conversely, is supported and influenced by them. Evidently, it doesn't exhaust its potential in deconstruction as an end in

itself. Koether's interest doesn't lie in revealing, disrupting, and presenting the hierarchical orders and constructions of painting and its attendant discourses as historically conditioned entities. Quite the reverse: she is intent on capturing the properties of the medium's modes of production, the surface of the canvas, the colors, forms, and motifs in their webs of incomprehensible connections and contradictions. Her form of painting launches an assault on the core constitutive constructions of the medium itself in order to isolate its cosmological vigor and potential:

> Figure of Paint, as an existential means, in the behavior toward the growing and fading of EVERYTHING.[25]

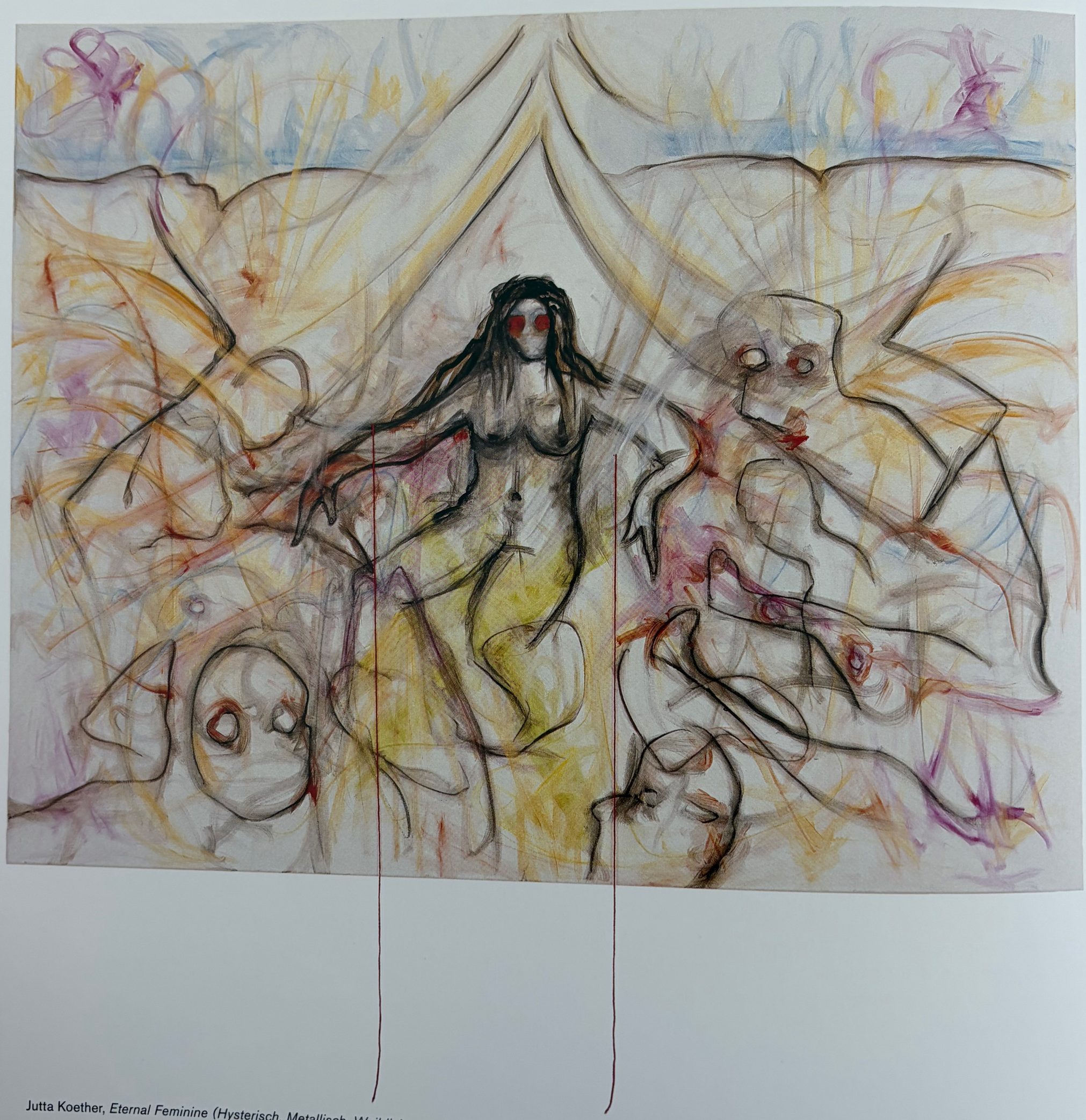
NOTES

1. Lawrence Gowing, "Painter and Apple" in *The Arts*, no. 1 (1945), republished as *Painter and Apple*, exh. cat. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1983).
2. Meyer Schapiro, "The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life," in *Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries*, ed. Schapiro (New York: G. Braziller, 1978), 27.
3. Cf. Ève Chiapello, "Evolution und Kooption. Die 'Künstlerkritik' und der normative Wandel" ("Evolution and Co-optation: 'Artist Critique' and Normative Change"), in *Kritische Gesellschaften* (*Critical Societies*), ed. Angelika Stepken (Nuremberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2006), 38. Taking this a little further, they are also an expression of the gentrification of the artistic processes at work in the appropriation, reproduction, and sampling of images, that is to say, of visual data. In her series "(traced)" (ongoing since 2013), Louise Lawler would appear to be mapping this cultural appropriation of methodologies that she helped develop. She traces what have by now become her canonical photographic appropriations of modernist and contemporary art digitally with black vector-based lines, so that she can enlarge or reduce them with absolute variability. Printed on self-adhesive vinyl foil, these spectral silhouettes of her work are mostly affixed to the wall directly, whereas the works in the series "(traced and painted)" (2014) have been printed on paper, with Lawler herself filling in the outlines using gouache.
4. In her *SPEX* column "Mrs. Benway," Koether writes about the music video to The Cure's hit "Close to Me": "They just carry on playing and the fact that they are drowning doesn't seem to matter.... Are they trying to make us believe that there is nothing to lose or nothing to be gained?" Jutta Koether, "Mrs. Benway Passagen. Kähne, Kunstmarkt, und eine Kur" ("Mrs. Benway Passages: Barges, Art Market, and a Cure"), *SPEX*, December 1985, 56.
5. With reference to the historicization of the AIDS crisis in the US, Sarah Schulman illuminates the processes of exchange and homogenization of complex, individuated, and dynamic forms of both thinking and activism on the part of diverse classes, ethnicities, races, sexualities, and languages with a gentrified, ring-fenced form of culture: Sarah Schulman, *Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
6. David Joselit introduces the view of "painting beside itself" most decidedly in reference to Koether's practice in his "Painting beside Itself," *October*, no. 130 (Autumn 2009): 125–34.
7. Projects such as the conferences *Painting: The Implicit Horizon* and *Painting beyond itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition*, with their accompanying readers; and the exhibition and catalogue *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age* tried in immediate succession to capture the current specificity of this phenomenon. Koether played a central role in differing ways in the two latter projects. Cf. Avigail Moss and Kerstin Stakemeier, eds., *Painting: The Implicit Horizon* (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012); Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, eds., *Painting beyond itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016); Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit, eds., *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, exh. cat. (Munich: Museum Brandhorst / Delmonico Books; Vienna: Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2016).
8. Cf. Jutta Koether, "Beyond, Beyond! Two Years after the Conference," in *Painting beyond Itself*, 55. *Änderungen aller Art* (*Alterations of All Kinds*) was likewise the title of Koether's last survey show in 2007 at the Kunsthalle Bern, which was also staged as *Fantasia Colonia* at the Kölnischer Kunstverein.
9. Cf. Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 15.
10. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "A Conversation with Jutta Koether," *October*, no. 157 (Summer 2016): 18.
11. Cf. Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (London: Continuum, 2005), 165.
12. Kathy Acker, "On Delany the Magician: A Foreword," in Samuel Delany, *Trouble on Triton* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996): X.
13. Koether describes the idea of "Beyond, Beyond painting" as a kind of painting in which complex pictorial forces hold sway and the act of viewing becomes an act of love or bewitchment. Cf. Koether "Beyond, Beyond! Two Years after the Conference," in *Painting beyond itself*, 60.
14. Acker, "On Delany," X.
15. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 29.
16. Cf. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 117–21.
17. Cf. Artaud, *The Theater*, 89–93.
18. Jutta Koether, *f.* (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1987), 29.
19. Cf. Koether, *f.*, 21–22.
20. Cf. Koether, *f.*, 31.
21. Artaud, *The Theater,* 124.
22. William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (London: Penguin, 2015), 52.
23. The triangle has been another of Koether's long-serving companions over the years, from the abstracted form of the female pubic area to shaped canvases like the scarlet equilateral triangle titled *Palindrom* (2009). The red triangle likewise plays a central role as an occult universal sign in Kenneth Anger's film *Lucifer Rising* (1972), another fixed star in Koether's cosmos of references.
24. The painting's title is a quote from Jean Clair's reading of Freud's painting. He describes the painter's portraits as more naked than naked, as *écorché*, depictions of a body without skin or anatomical preparations of solely bones and muscles. Jean Clair, "Freud, the Biologist," in *Lucian Freud: The Studio*, ed. Cécile Debray, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou; Munich: Hirmer, 2010), 48. Koether consistently uses quotes from her reading as work titles. This indicates precisely the fundamental importance of writing (on painting) for her painterly practice. Her reference to observations sparked by painting or seemingly demanded by it that are formulated in words are on equal footing with her visual reference to images.
25. Jutta Koether, "Figure of Paint: On the Incontrovertible!," *Texte zur Kunst*, December 2015, 138.

JUTTA KOETHER: ENLISTING CÉZANNE

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

for Y. A. B.



Jutta Koether, *Eternal Feminine (Hysterisch, Metallisch, Weiblich – nach Cézanne, 2. Version)*, 2006. Oil on canvas, red thread; canvas: 63 x 78⅝ inches (160 x 200 cm), overall: 88½ x 86⅔ inches (224 x 200 cm)

As long as there is still a single beggar on earth, there will still be myth.
—Walter Benjamin[1]

And unwraps, as though it were linen sheets
In which birth and death are swathed,
the alphabet womb, chrysalis
of green and red and white obscurity.
—Nelly Sachs[2]

The changing shapes of a changing world—we grow accustomed to them and seldom ever wonder why they arise. If changing shapes are to become the object of study, the evidence must be presented visually. That is exactly what I do.
—Mrs. Benway[3]

When Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (a slightly younger contemporary of Nicolas Poussin) advised other writers in the eighteenth century that one had to return at least a hundred times to the written page to verify whether one could actually still achieve any meaningful poetic utterance, he might have extended his historical skepticism and scrutiny to painting as well, acknowledging that to perpetually doubt its necessity and credibility would become one of the crucial constitutive features for painting's imminent modernity. We will combine this model of epistemological self-doubt, which generates a peculiar repetition compulsion, with a socioeconomic one. It is invoked in Walter Benjamin's rather well-known yet enigmatic prophecy noted above, which suggests that the social sphere would not be redeemed from mythical thought as long as even a single beggar wanders the world.

Could this model be transferred from the sphere of social and economic relations to that of cultural representation? From the perspective of the regime of the digital image, painting is now much more decisively impoverished than under any of the earlier visual regimes, be it that of photography, or even of cinematic technology. Painting is now the designated pauper, perpetually scraping the floors of history for any remaining credible deposits of artisanal forms of cultural production. And since painting literally embodies all those retarded modes of thinking, obsolete ways of making and of seeing, it inevitably shares the conditions of myth, (in)voluntarily enacting the role of the beggar in the sphere of cultural-industrial representations. In the deepest recesses of these mythical formations we find the seemingly unchallenged rules of patriarchy, the distribution forms of private property, and the psychosomatic fetishization of experience. United with the seemingly everlasting promises that only exceptional skills, manual dexterity, and virtuosity make the man, and the man an artist, all form an ensemble that enhances these transhistorical promises, if not guarantees, to make painting an inexhaustible source of the production of surplus value.

One question this essay will try to clarify is why Jutta Koether, a radical feminist writer, musician, and thinker, decided around 1983 to take on the role of the beggar and devote her life to the practice of painting. In 1990, a seemingly awkward painting (even executed in two different versions), posturing as a manifesto of gendered hubris, lists the key male painters of modernity—Cézanne, Courbet, Manet, van Gogh—in what would become Koether's trademark violent-red monochrome. Provocatively concluding the list with the personal pronoun "ICH" (I), at the bottom, she seems to situate herself as the necessary sequel of that lineage. (One should notice, however, that the function of the shifter "I" does not just position the artist, but also challenges all readers / spectators to confront and contemplate their own relations to the grand painterly lineage of modernity.)[4]

Koether's genealogical pathos or pretense might appear at first as an almost quixotic gauntlet. But the gesture is perhaps less astounding if we remember that the artist was partially formed in multiple dialogic relations with a group of male, if not masculinist, painters—an indifferent, if not condescending, band of literally congenital provocative agents in provincial Cologne and Hamburg. These male peers pretended to know one hundred years of antipainterly gestures by rote, if not by heart. And each German generation of antipainters had only slightly exacerbated their histrionic declarations to relieve us from painting's mythical powers (ranging from Sigmar Polke's late reception of Francis Picabia to the group that was rightfully called the "Mülheimer Freiheit" to the climax of Martin Kippenberger's late reception of Polke).[5] Apparently these rebels had not understood that their travesties of painting (if not already Picabia's) were caught in an Oedipal trap of their own making, since they performed the rebellion against the paternal laws of painting from a position of male masochism, never challenging painting itself as the hegemonic form—neither formally, nor conceptually, nor economically. In the very act of opposing it, they only renewed its credibility.[6]

These schisms become strikingly obvious in Koether's famous conversation with Kippenberger, where she ever so subtly leads the master like a mule to publicly perform the role of male painter as self-denying masochist, going so far as to make him single out the generation of American women artists of the 1980s and '90s (i.e., Louise Lawler, Barbara Kruger, and Andrea Fraser) as the truly important artists of that period. Kippenberger's ostentatious posture of self-denial, which ultimately appears to contest painting's validity altogether, reminds us at times of Clint Eastwood's performances of helplessness in Hollywood action films, about which media and gender theorist Paul Smith has stated that

> the male masochist in important ways obeys and serves the phallic law.... Male masochism is at first a way of not having to submit to the law, but equally it turns out to be a way of not breaking with the law.... Male masochism might finally be seen as another way for the male subject to temporarily challenge his desire for the father and to subvert the phallic law, as ultimately another step in the way ... of guaranteeing the male subject as origin of the production of meanings.[7]

Louise Lawler, Installation at Artists Space, New York, 1978

In his important essay on "network painting," even David Joselit pointed to Kippenberger as a figure for theoretical and historical reference to identify the epistemological changes his approach had supposedly brought about, primarily the recognition that paintings are now essentially overdetermined and supposedly transitive, i.e., interactive with numerous contextual conditions (institutional, economic, discursive, epistemological). Thus Joselit states that there has been a tendency in recent painting

> to suture spectators to extra-perceptual social networks rather than merely situating them in a phenomenological relationship of individual perception.[8]

This observation—and its generous tribute to Kippenberger—is all the more surprising, since similar reflections on painting as an object of network relations had already been formulated programmatically in the late 1970s outside the parameters of painting. One central example could indeed be a work by an artist explicitly cherished by Kippenberger, Lawler's crucial installation at Artists Space in New York in 1978, which combined a painting (of a racehorse borrowed from a track on Long Island) with props for an almost cinematic illumination, serving as ostentatious tools of the inextricable "network" necessary for the actual perception of the painting itself. (Ironically, these props fused exhibition, institutional space, and external architecture while almost blinding the spectator.) Another, even more striking example outside of the perimeters of painting would occur a few years later, in 1982, when Michael Asher, in his contribution to the Seventy-Fourth American Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, paid two selected groups of six people to act as viewers of a painting by Pablo Picasso (*Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* [1910]) and one by Marcel Duchamp (*Nude Seated in a Bathtub* [1910]), alternating their assignments for thirty minutes each and performing the role of museum visitor.[9]

With hindsight it appears almost as though Koether had grasped early on that all the male maneuvers to liquidate painting by means of painting alone had only deteriorated since Picabia's originally sublime acts of painterly annihilation devolved to increasingly juvenile and banal iterations. Thus she formulates a markedly different position, affirming that her practice of painting aimed to define

> a material problem in relation to painting. My method: literalize, materialize, liquidize. Impermanent configurations. Irrepressible flux of compositions and re-appropriations.[10]

Dissing Duchamp

Given Koether's masculinist German friends and the anti-painterly painters, it would have been all the more plausible for her to have taken the road that had led many painters to degender masculinist concepts of painting since the mid to late 1950s (e.g., figures from Jasper Johns to Cy Twombly to Andy Warhol) in order to reflect more critically on the continuing, or rather the lost, viability of that tradition of antipainting by finally acknowledging the irrepressible impact of Duchamp's readymades on painting. But our assumption that Koether's antipainterly intelligence would have led her to an enthusiastic embrace of the legacies of Duchamp and Warhol—a choice that Sherrie Levine and Lawler, for example, still considered compelling when starting their own projects in the late 1970s—will have to be disappointed. Had it not been one of the readymade's promises that, with the universalization of reification, all traditional deceptions about artistic competence embedded in the hand would finally fall by the historical wayside? And had not Duchamp himself enacted the most sublime derision of masculinist conceptions of authorial identity and discredited the seemingly irrepressible intersection between painting and gendered subjectivity when he posed as Rrose Sélavy in 1920? Or when he referred to the painter's brush somewhat salaciously and subversively as the "stick with hairs on its ends"? Or when, in another of his famous puns on painting, he manufactured an assisted readymade of a comb, invoking either the grammatical imperative *peigne* (paint!) or—more likely—bemusedly confronting the seemingly transhistorical unconscious command spoken to all artists, to paint? Inscribed on the rim of the comb, an utterly obsolete tool from painters' workshops of the past used to distribute pigment, was the (once again) ever so subtly obscene and emasculating French title: *3 ou 4 gouttes de hauteur n'ont rien à faire avec la sauvagerie* (*Three or Four Drops from the Height of the author Have Nothing to Do with Savagery*).[11]

Yet it seems that Koether engaged with these crucial positions only temporarily, in transit to a fundamentally different set of painterly and artistic concerns. But at least in one instance in 1991, in the design for a diptych poster for her exhibition—appropriately called *koether: massen*—of a group of twelve paintings at the Generali Foundation in Vienna, she engaged with both

Jutta Koether, exhibition poster for *koether: massen – malerei und versammlung*, Generali Foundation, Vienna, 1991

Andy Warhol, *Self-Portrait*, 1964.
Acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas,
20 1⁄16 × 16 ½ inches (50.9 × 41.9 cm)

Duchamp and Warhol in a programmatically phased one-two-punch exorcism.

On the left side of the diptych, the thirty-three-year-old Koether appears in a confident and ever so slightly confrontational photographic self-portrait, clearly citing and inverting Warhol's photographic selves from the early 1960s, in which the artist posed with dandyish boredom and indifferent disdain. Koether, by contrast, confronts her spectators with an ingenuous gaze; neither dandyish nor dismissive, neither submissive nor seductive. The performative inversion of gendered roles from male dandy to feminist activist is enhanced by inserting a typewritten text that translates the common vulgar American appeal for oral sex ("give head") into an utterly uncommon and incomprehensible literal German translation ("gib Kopf"), complemented by the additional English inscription "here to serve you in all dimensions." This statement might at first thoroughly puzzle and bewilder, until one realizes that the poster literally—in a sublime inversion of terms and roles—endows the female artist with a facial apparition, giving herself a *head* on the historical stage as an artist of the future. This effect is exacerbated by Koether's color choice for the poster, an organic forest green, situating the image at the opposite end of Warhol's color spectrum, which had primarily deployed red, silver, pink, and orange tints.[12] And further mimicking and dissing Warhol's strategies, Koether intensifies the citational contrast when installing her poster in a potentially infinite serial repetition.

But it is the dexter panel of the diptych that really delivers the second punch of Koether's confrontation with the legacies of Duchamp and Warhol. What might appear at first as a photomontage turns out to be a sculptural assemblage of provocative obscenity. Koether had encountered this assemblage—two legs from a shop-window mannequin, sutured on either side of a functioning urinal—in a men's room in a bar in Vienna and photographed it (the violence of the erect and spread-open legs forcing us to think first of Hans Bellmer's *poupées* before we can return to the more obviously intended reference to the "original" urinal itself).[13] The outright sexist obscenity of this assemblage suddenly uncovers the heterosexist undercurrents running deep in the readymade, even back to the first official one from 1917. After all, had Duchamp not originally made the convincing claim that the myth of the male procreator would have to disappear once manual labor had been eradicated from the processes of artistic manufacture? And would the merely declaratory nominalist act of a collectively and anonymously produced object of consumption not henceforth initiate universal gender neutrality in artistic production?[14]

Thus we have to wonder all the more: What could have possibly motivated Koether in 1991 to engage in such an aggressive reversal of Duchamp's and Warhol's mythical promises? Had not these promises precisely sustained the departure from traditional concepts of authorship and male painterly identities in the work of the previous generation of female artists so admired by Kippenberger? And why would Koether have wanted to resist the received ideas of 1960s Pop modernity and its citational seductions of a possible reconciliation between the artistic avant-garde and mass-cultural practices? For now we can only speculate that Koether diagnosed Pop art's promises as a false reconciliation of art and mass culture, and that this insight ignited her desire to distance herself from those American (and some European) artists who were still advocating the fusion of Duchamp's and Warhol's antiaesthetics as their foundational principle. Not surprisingly, then, the title of the exhibition itself, typed across the two panels of the diptych, is *koether: massen*, supplemented by an additional typed inscription stating *mass—age new rage: collective and anonymous*.

The actual paintings displayed in Vienna were all titled (and numbered) *Massen*. These might at first appear as rather illegible, if not outright failed, attempts to depict a mass accumulation—urban crowds during an uprising or a peaceful congregation. Yet on further contemplation, these uncannily colorful paintings seem to be suspended between equally failed but historically important attempts in German post-expressionist painting to depict urban masses, such as George Grosz's *Dedication to Oskar Panizza* (1917–18), for example, or a figurative painter such as Pavel Filonov, whose fusion of post-Cubist faceting and a renewed urgency for figuration seems to have been a model for Koether's painting at a later moment. Or possibly even a response to a singular (and equally failed) attempt in Warhol's early oeuvre to represent the "masses" in his painting *Crowd* (1963). As with the ambiguity of the inscriptions on the poster, the saccharine coloration of Koether's paintings and the near-infantile simplicity of the drawing and compositional order of the figures seem to challenge the waning credibility of any current claim (which had been made at least since the time of Warhol's Pop art) to actually reconcile art and the masses, or to actually communicate with heretofore excluded audiences by means of neo-avant-garde production. 73, 74

From Koether's perspective, then, at the moment of the early 1990s, it appeared insufficient—if not outright unacceptable—to

merely follow the originary male initiatives of degendering artistic conception by recathecting production procedures exclusively onto the designation of industrial objects of daily consumption. Rather, Koether's choice to be an assertively female and a feminist artist meant that she not only refused to reperform Duchamp and Warhol's decisive acts of degendering, but also that, for her, every step of the emancipation from the traditions of masculinist principles of artistic production had to be performed by a female artist. And, perhaps most important, these radical acts of degendering now had to be performed within the territory of, and with the means of, painting itself, precisely because painting had remained the dominion of male domination throughout modernism. Koether stated in retrospect that

> once I had decided to devote my life to painting … this meant in my world to deliver this also as a performance, a practice of staging, in order to reconfigure the old canon as a counter-canon.[15]

Enlisting Cézanne

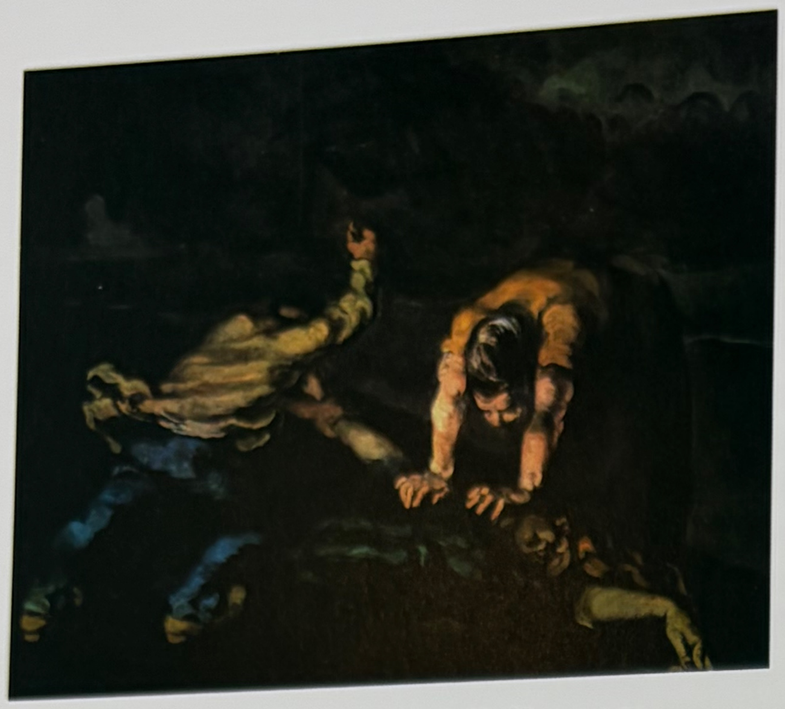
Thus, the poster diptych for the exhibition at the Generali Foundation in 1991 also summed up Koether's own excursion—evident in the citational paintings she made between 1989 and 1990—into modes of appropriation that defined a generation of artists in New York in the 1980s. Koether's paintings were simultaneously obvious and illegible copies of Courbet's *Origine du monde* (1866), of Manet's *Asparagus Still Life* (1880) [ill. p. 234], and of van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1889). To uninformed observers they might have appeared as more or less hapless or listless recitations of masterpieces of modernity, on which an almost compulsive red monochrome tint seems to have been grafted along with Koether's increasingly nervous painterly facture, drawn with ostentatiously delivered "draftsmanly" disabilities.[16]

63 64, 65

And once again it could be productive to glance briefly backward to Koether's slightly older female American peers, favored by Kippenberger. Contemplating the obsolete legacies (or the utter inaccessibility) of modernist painting, those artists had performed seemingly comparable but in fact fundamentally opposite citational operations at the very moment in the late 1980s when Koether decided to engage with the legacies of modernist painting in general and eventually with Cézanne in particular. Most notably, one could think of Levine's watercolors (e.g., *After Mondrian*, 1983), which had rehearsed these legacies in a mode of melancholic retrospection on modernism's fate under conditions of historical reception and technical reproduction, mixed with a subtext of slight self-mockery to avert the veneration that acts of appropriation still entailed at that time. And while clearly aware of these strategies of appropriation, Koether's paraphrases of Manet, Courbet, and van Gogh actually inverted all of these principles, including the mocking melancholy. By contrast, enlisting Cézanne[17] to transform painting itself into a present-day female practice would become increasingly formative for Koether's subsequent project, as though she had to reconfigure the foundations of modernist painting by returning to the very moment before painting in the twentieth century was reformatted in a masculinist mode.[18] Quite tellingly, the two central figures of early Cézanne reception, Picasso and Matisse, had both alternated in calling the master from Aix either the "father" or the "mother" of modernist painting. This unconscious ambiguity suggests that we should speculate further on whether Cézanne's strategies and techniques had operated in relative independence from the imminent masculinist inscriptions of painting (along with the legacies of Seurat, of course, for whom the mechanization of the painterly process itself had held similar promises).

Thus, beginning in the early 1990s, Koether adopts one by one some of the central yet often enigmatic principles that had defined Cézanne's painterly projects in various contradictory phases since the early 1860s. On the level of figurative representation, Koether could easily have taken her first lessons in de-skilling drawing from Cézanne's own hebephrenic figuration in *The Four Seasons*, a work that the young master from Aix had painted as interior decorations for his paternal home in Jas de Bouffan in 1860–61, and which he had signed "Ingres" and dated "1811." But perhaps Koether learned even more from the almost grotesque anatomical distortions and violence of Cézanne's work from the later 1860s. In paintings such as *The Murder* (ca. 1867–70), *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (ca. 1877), or *Pastoral* (1870), the master deliberately botched his drawing and design of mostly female bodies to acerbically and provocatively distance himself even further from the common veneration of Ingres's Neoclassical authority. And Cézanne's almost compulsive reduction of these paintings to an utterly denaturing monochromy of blue and nearly black tints allowed him to drastically differentiate his project from the equally venerated and powerful chromatic romanticism of Delacroix. Cézanne's scenes of psychosexual mayhem, murder, and rape, and his slightly later grotesque travesties of painting that provided fantasies of libidinal excess and erotic gratification for a new bourgeoisie, signaled to a mostly uncomprehending public that with the reign of Napoleon III a period of utter brutality, consumer corruption, and banality had been established—one that neither Ingres's Neoclassical differentiations nor Delacroix's romantic delusions could adequately reflect or describe, let alone represent.

Koether's excessive forms of de-skilling for a new age take Cézanne's debasing of the ruling principles of artistic refinement as a historical license. Her drawings—as is strikingly evident, for example, in the bewildering portrait *Lagerfeld* (2002) or, later, in her images of the race-car driver Sebastian Vettel (in the series "The Seven Sacraments" [2012])—seem to have abandoned even the most residual or last remaining concepts of manual artistic competence, appearing often as nothing more than hurried sketches or almost painfully compulsive doodles. These new standards of de-skilling inaugurate an awareness of similar conditions of utter debasement in present-day collective



Paul Cézanne, *The Murder*, 1867–70. Oil on canvas, 25 3/16 × 31 7/8 inches (64 × 81 cm)

life, as though Koether had recognized that a wider chasm had opened than ever before: that is, the chasm between a painter's desire to achieve—if not to exceed—the given historical levels of painterly knowledge and differentiation, and the necessity of enforcing an antipainterly aesthetic that actually corresponds to the collectively governing forms of extreme desublimation.

If this comparative reach backward to Cézanne appears as an odd stretch, one might want to reflect on artists that were historically closer to Koether to recognize the topicality and specificity of her massive de-skilling attacks. Cy Twombly or Sigmar Polke, for example, had been eminent draftsmen in the 1950s and '60s precisely because they had practiced the most aggressive modes of de-skilling drawing and figuration. If it was the particular historical context of advanced consumer culture in the post–World War II reconstruction period that necessitated their resurrection of Dubuffet's *art brut* and the legacies of the art of the insane from Hans Prinzhorn's *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* (*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*) in 1922, one could instantly understand why painters in the present who still anchor their resistance in these primitivizing models are bound to fail in simple success. If de-skilling had been the supreme strategy of artistic resistance throughout the 1960s and until the 1980s, and had fulfilled the prophecies of a universally liberating antiaesthetic from Duchamp to Cage to Fluxus, it has by now become the cultural-industrial and ideological standard, not only in terms of artistic techniques and genres (e.g., the selfie as portrait), but also in terms of identity constructions and performative role enactments.

Koether thus confronts a new dialectic that originates in utter social disdain for the very concepts of deviance and subversion with which critical cultural practices had previously engaged. In the officious nihilism of antiartistic agencies (from Koons to Kippenberger) the ruling powers can find their own profound contempt for the former functions of cultural production cynically legitimized. Not surprisingly, Koether herself has quite clearly described the conditions of this new historical dialectic:

> Money is an immaterial material. It surpasses the planes. This is the beyond of the things and the surfaces: the social, the sculpture, the networks. Capital has become the supreme pleasure and joy, the grandest and the largest and the most decisive of all. The thing that nobody can measure anymore, larger than everything and bigger than all souls counted together.... Money has become the biggest thing of all, it has acquired the condition of gas, and to measure and calculate it has now become the biggest task, its stench is stronger than the stench of corpses because it incorporates the stench of corpses, because on the one hand money incorporates and converts everything, and on the other it suspends all other means of measuring, so that everything disintegrates.... And money effects [sic] all other things, all qualities and all grown features of hearts and tomatoes, of women and of wounds, of space and of hand.[19]

Koether's utter debauchery of drawing finds its rather startling complement in her conception of color, specifically her red monochromy. If the paradigm of the monochrome had been central to modernism's scientific-enlightenment project at the moment of its invention in 1921, it appears in Koether's hands as a strategy to transform the pathologies of loss and restriction into a practice of painterly resistance. Her frequent though not total reduction of painting to a haunting red monochrome seems to originate more in a concept of color as branding, or as resulting from the consumption of cosmetics. And as if making a mockery of the color theories of modernism, she often employs a shrill pseudo-scientific variation of the chromatic complements of red and green. Koether's own commentaries on her color choices leave no doubt about her motivations for advancing a new monochrome, which are fundamentally different from any we might have heard or read about in the paradigm's previous appearances:

> She confirmed this in that her red had nothing to do with the red of the body or of flesh, even on the various occasions when she had painted body parts, which always contradicted flesh even though she had seen many magnificent paintings of flesh, among them Rubens' female bodies. But these were mostly illustrations of myths and legends in flesh, and the color of the flesh was not red.... Red paintings don't show flesh and don't resemble flesh, rather they resemble little red army units, cells. If anything, bloody money rather than bloody flesh.[20]

Yet the most manifest—and actually verifiable—impact on Koether's paintings after 1990 was derived from crucial principles Cézanne had introduced only in his later work: the paradigmatic changes of his painterly facture and gesture into molecular units of fragmented painterly marks, i.e., the increasing fracturing

and faceting of the painterly process itself.[21] This fragmentation had not only generated a continuously expanding dialectical tension between painterly support (the canvas or paper) and the material deposits of paint itself, but also an equally intense opposition between opacity and transparency. And it had endowed oil painting with the paradoxical features of a perpetual *non finito*, seemingly taking its cues from the conventions of the watercolor, the only painterly medium in which the play between a carefully finished and a suddenly fractured or voided surface revealing the support had been considered legitimate. Koether might have been additionally attracted to these Cézannist modes of paint application, since they not only mimicked the watercolor as the single genre that had been granted to female amateurs as a practice of painting, but also because, more importantly, faceting itself innately contradicted the virile rule that oil painting had to meticulously cover the canvas's entire planar expansion.[22]

Koether's subsequent iconographic adaptation of one of Cézanne's lifelong preoccupations—apples—thereafter became an infinitely expanded and varied trope in her painterly project, situated halfway between adulation and mockery, carrying all the features of a fruit that has finally been freed from the erotic and sexual symbolism with which it had been invested for centuries. Had not the evacuation from these mythical and erotic projections itself been one of the great acts of enlightenment in Cézanne's later work, i.e., the moment when an apple finally was just a fruit? And had painting therefore (and hopefully its spectators) not been emancipated once and for all from the purposes of libidinal and erotic substitutions?[23]

Among Koether's increasingly refined performances and productions of painterly desublimation, these *natures mortes* of apples, once the sacred iconographic sites of male sublimation, have now acquired a peculiarly ambivalent status, both as serialized homages to the master and almost cheapened as an ubiquitous quote. And Koether's apparently rapidly executed apple paintings (reminiscent perhaps of Fragonard's famous claim to paint faster than any of his contemporaries), by now rather large in number, appear rather diffident, almost amused in their competent delivery of the historically assigned tropes of the male painter. Koether's apples have since acquired the physiognomies of an artistic brand, something on the reverse order of Warhol's "Marilyns," perhaps, to mention another painter who prided himself not only on branding but equally on the rapid serial production and multiplication of icons.

But we would not be in the presence of a complex artist and her ever more demanding challenges if we did not encounter the complete reversal of all of these principles—and thereby have to confront the contestation, if not the demolition, of all of our interpretive attempts—in a more recent work, a painting that in many regards might well perform the role of a real chef d'oeuvre, in the most literal sense of the term: the master piece. For her third installation in a sequence of three exhibitions at the Berlin alternative space PRAXES, in November 2013, Koether painted and installed an image of a rather imposing phallus. The phallus

Paul Cézanne, *Five Apples*, 1877–78. Oil on canvas, 5 × 10 inches (12.7 × 25.5 cm)

imposed itself in at least three ways on its viewers. First, it was imposing due to its size, since Koether went as far as adopting the 1960s male convention of a "shaped canvas," not, in this case, however, to emphasize the painting's status as relief or object but to accommodate the extensive testicles of the depicted organ. Second, the painting's phallus was imposing due to its color, since Koether clearly maxed out the full spectrum of her notorious red, giving it all the tonal modulations that the limited tint provides. And thirdly, the painting was even more imposing in its manifest display of an exceptional and utterly unforeseeable, almost triumphant return to draftsmanly competence. The artist now expressed all of her previously hidden or suppressed skills and endowed this organ with a precise drawing, a sculptural plasticity and an almost crystalline modeling, to affirm her indebtedness to the very master who had degendered painting. So, I must either recant my previous argumentation or develop a plausible account of this extraordinary contradiction, the painting of a phallus that carries the name of Koether's closest critical supporter and intellectual ally for several decades: *Isabelle* (Graw).[24]

One way to approach this conflicted task would be to at least briefly trace the iconography of the representation of the phallus in the twentieth century, beginning with the most famous scandal of Constantin Brancusi, who exhibited his rather outright and outrageous sculpture *Princess X* (1915–16) to a baffled Parisian audience at the Salon des Indépendants in 1920, from which it was removed over the protests of its author and his fellow artists.[25] From there we move on to Louise Bourgeois's response to the Brancusi scandal in her work *Fillette,* produced in 1968 and made subsequently even more famous by her performative presentation of it in a photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe in 1982. And, finally, almost anticipating Mapplethorpe's photograph, there is the now-infamous advertisement that the sculptor Lynda Benglis, clearly picking up where Bourgeois had left off, placed in the

Robert Mapplethorpe, *Louise Bourgeois*, 1982.
Gelatin silver print, 14 ¾ × 14 ¾ inches (37.5 × 37.4 cm)

November 1974 issue of *Artforum*. Benglis's self-portrait with a double dildo led to the departure of two of the magazine's most important editors, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, and to the founding of *October* magazine shortly thereafter. All of these performative stagings of the phallus were obviously known to Koether when she painted *Isabelle*, and it is now upon me to situate her within that theoretically charged lineage.[26]

First of all, I have to explain for what reason and to what extent Koether's rendering of the phallus delivers an almost triumphant performance of her newfound painterly skills, as though her historical mission and status as a painter depended on that concept and its practice, when most of her previous work had engaged in a radical new key of de-skilling.[27] Three possible responses come to mind in this first confrontation with Koether's phallus. The first would be a statement by Bourgeois, supplying a traditional (and somewhat dated and orthodox) psychoanalytic answer, but worth quoting since she most likely provided one of the models for Koether's own intervention:

> Woman identifies with the penis in order to defend herself … woman feels vulnerable because she can be wounded by the penis. Therefore she attempts to appropriate the weapon of the aggressor for herself.[28]

And one of Koether's earlier statements seems to justify this interpretation to at least some extent, when she stated that

> many people have often said of me that I am hysterical and histrionic, which obstructs the view, but I am familiar with the terms and conditions that necessitate hysteria.[29]

The second theorization of the representation of the phallus (again in Bourgeois's case) was provided in Mignon Nixon's account of the Mapplethorpe photograph, which considerably developed Bourgeois's limited explanation by introducing Jacques Lacan's concept of the "phallus," necessary for the crucial distinction between the mere representation of the male organ and the concept of the phallus as a signifier. As Lacan famously stated,

> the phallus is not a fantasy … nor is it as such an object (part, internal, good, bad, etc.…) in so far as this term tends to accentuate the reality involved in a relationship. It is even less the organ, penis or clitoris, which it symbolizes.[30]

And it is in a comparison between Nixon's reading of Bourgeois's performance (more so than of her actual sculpture) and Koether's painterly enactment of the phallus in her painting *Isabelle* that the differences between a theoretical interpretation and an artistic model of actual production become perhaps a bit more transparent. I would argue that Koether precisely does *not* operate like Bourgeois, for, as Nixon states, by "performing a fantasy of aggression toward the phallus and the infant," Bourgeois

> demonstrated how the artist/mother might be constituted as a subject through aggression. In Mapplethorpe's photograph, Bourgeois made herself the very image of the bad enough mother: the mother who grins at the patriarchal overvaluation of the phallus, who parodies the metonymy of infant and penis, and in whose hands the phallus becomes penis, or in other words slips from its status as privileged signifier to become one more object of aggression and desire.[31]

Rather, Koether's painting manifestly states that her newly found or newly admitted skills have successfully acceded to the symbolic order of modernist painting, established—at least in her mind—by Cézanne, and that it is precisely as a female painter that she has defined access to the paternal laws. Yet if Lacan argues that the phallus can only play its role when veiled, Koether triumphantly displays and unveils the symbolic order of painting by performing it on its own terms—neither denying the paternal rule as the masochistic male antipainters do, nor essentializing the practice of painting by privileging the biologically established terms of gender. It is important, then, to return to one of the questions posed at the beginning of this essay, the question of Koether's necessary departure and decisive difference from the masculinist antipainters. Her desire to conceive of, and to insist on, a practice of painting in the present cannot follow the principles of the male masochist, who, to quote Paul Smith once more, precisely operates in

> a closed space where masculinity sets the terms and expounds the conditions of a kind of struggle with itself—not a struggle necessarily for closure, but a struggle to maintain in a pleasurable tension the stages of a symbolic relation to the father—a struggle in which ironically, the body becomes forgotten.[32]

Installation view, *Cycle 1. Jutta Koether. Viktoria, Luise, Isabelle*, PRAXES Center for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2013

The forgotten body, of course, in this context of the male antipainters, is also the body of painting itself.

It will remain unresolved in this essay (and perhaps the question cannot be answered) which of the various fallacious adaptations of Cézanne's (and subsequently of Cubism's) faceting of the manifestly fragmented painterly application process Koether has actually adopted. Whether her faceting follows the German Expressionists (like Franz Marc), who turned the process into the simulation of mystical light in nature, or whether she rather follows the Italian Futurists (like Umberto Boccioni), who variously turned the Cézannist facets (if by intentional misreading or by incomprehension) into mimetic fragments of motion technology. Or whether, closer to home, Koether follows the Weimar misreading of the post-expressionist Grosz, who forced Cézanne's fractures and facets to simulate the accents of a universal chaotic urban dynamism. At times it might even appear as though Koether's "body of painting" was most indebted to another outsider of modernist history, Filonov, who attempted to recode facets and fractured units into the biological nuclei of a new life by producing images of an emerging proletarian class that urgently needed figurative representation.

Koether seems to have self-consciously adopted all of these potential or deliberate fallacies, which detourn the once-rigorous self-reflexivity of the Cézannian analysis of fragments and facets of the pictorial surface. If their primary and ultimate motivation had been to confront their spectators with an analytical recording of the smallest units of pictorial construction freed from even the faintest mimetic functions in order to solely induce elementary perceptual and phenomenological acts, then Koether's project both simultaneously embodies and dismantles these paternal laws. So the question opens up whether any of her recodings, her reinscriptions of these molecular facets of painting with numinous referents (mystical light, mechanical or machinic speed, an emerging proletarian subjectivity), could be justified or necessary in the present, or whether from the modernist perspective that she has so succinctly aimed to embrace, Koether's almost universal application of all of these reactionary functions would force us to read certain aspects of her painterly work as strangely and suspiciously *retardataire.*

Orthodox modernists might find this suspicion exacerbated as they encounter Koether's provocative claims associating herself with some of the most eccentric figures from the margins of modernity (e.g., Frank Auerbach, Balthus, Lucian Freud, and Florine Stettheimer). It seems that Koether's ostentatious embrace of these artists follows principles similar to her stylistic crosscutting. Rather than obliging an authoritarian canon formation focusing solely on a teleology emerging from Cézanne as the father of modernism, Koether turns her attention simultaneously to those figures who remained excluded from that teleology by choice or by historical discrediting, if not discrimination.

By mobilizing artists who have either evaded or failed to comply with modernist doxa, or those who have been put under erasure by paternal Cézannian laws (also the domain to which women artists in the twentieth century had long been relegated), Koether constructs her own countercanon. Thus she generates yet another complex set of oppositions within her own project, the simultaneous constitution of her work within the parameters of modernist doxa and within the parameters of a feminist countercanon. And while it is most certainly not a programmatic selection on Koether's part, it is still remarkable that the central figures in her modernist countercanon are all of German Jewish descent (from Berlin), who emigrated either voluntarily (like the Stettheimers at the turn of the century) or under growing duress (like the Klossowski/Balthus family in the late 1920s), or as children facing acute racist and fascist prosecution (like Auerbach and Freud) in the 1930s who fled to Paris, to London, or to New York. This points to yet another dimension in Koether's project of counteridentification, which is not only existentially substantiated by her pendulum life alternating between Berlin and New York, but also by her conception of an artistic identity that dismantles the patriarchally mediated nation-state claims on cultural production that had defined her male German friends in the 1980s.

But rather than engaging in a reactionary recovery of the antimodernist positions, or calling upon testimonies and witnesses supporting her own seemingly antimodernist projects, Koether's deferral to sidelined figures more closely follows the principle of recovery articulated in Walter Benjamin's description of the allegorical collector, or the rag-and-bone man, so to speak, who rescued the memory of those figures and objects that had been relegated by official versions and presentations of history to the margins or to the abject position—to obsolescence, and to the condition of being erased and forgotten.

Koether's strategies acknowledge that the modernist teleology of painting from Cézanne to Agnes Martin and the doxa of de-skilling from Duchamp to Fluxus now have to be intrinsically intertwined if painterly practice wants to uphold any of its cognitive and sublimating functions, and if de-skilling wants to sustain its functions of subversion and critique. These are the very oppositions that only the painter as beggar for remembrance can exert by her mere presence in the reality of economical and techno-industrial terror, as Koether recognized in a prognostic account in 2002 after a gallery tour in New York:

> Soon stories, celebrity bodies, terror, images music videos shops and ramps and pure trash will not be appropriated anymore. Soon they will just be channeled, those will become the golden days."[33]

NOTES

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999), 400
2. Nelly Sachs, "The Sohar," in *O The Chimneys: Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), 125.
3. Jutta Koether, *f.* (Graz: Edition Bleich-Rossi, 1987), 14.
4. Koether commented on the painting as follows: "At this point in time, I was engaged with creating pictures that worked through the painting models, monsters and trailblazers of modernism of the nineteenth century. A search for a 'family,' for the sense of belonging to a 'canon,' for one's own genealogy and an inscription in a public sense. The names were painted (see image). Tellingly, my favorite when searching titles at the time was 'Kartoffelesser' (Potato Eaters)." See Jutta Koether, "Figure of Paint: On the Incontrovertible!," *Texte zur Kunst*, December 2015, 134–39.
5. Three textual documents attest to Koether's early (and also her late) critical detachment from her entanglement with these paternalistic figures. The first—and the most important—is the extensive interview with Martin Kippenberger, conducted in 1991 and published in the third issue of the then-recently founded magazine *Texte zur Kunst* (edited by Isabelle Graw and the late Stefan Germer). An extensive excerpt from the rather terrible English translation of this important conversation was published in *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective*, ed. Ann Goldstein, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 310–40. The second document is Jutta Koether's comments on her relationship to the artists of the Mülheimer Freiheit, and her departure from the entanglement with this group, in a conversation with Mike Kelley in 1994: "In a way I first thought this is interesting and I want to be part of it, why not, and, you know, I want to be a painter too. It seemed so easy. They had so much fun. And pretty soon I was hanging out with them all the time and I realized it was just repetitive. They were not going anywhere with this. But this moment was pretty interesting, with a kind of explosion going on, but where is the thinking and what are they actually doing? I kind of withdrew from that scene." See Mike Kelley, "Jutta Koether," in *Mike Kelley. Interviews, Conversations, and Chit-Chat (1986–2004)*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP Ringier; Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2005), 113. The third—and much later—document reflecting once more on these paternal legacies is Koether's short but poignant essay on Sigmar Polke titled "Bad Dad," in *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963–2010*, eds. Kathy Halbreich, Mark Godfrey, Lanka Tattersall, and Magnus Schaefer, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 188–96.
6. As one of the numerous examples to document the provincial and *retardataire* iterations of antipainting after a belated German Picabia reception, one could point to Albert Oehlen's widely praised painting *Auch Einer* (*Another One*, 1985). The detailed discussions of this painting never even seem to know (or acknowledge) that it is a direct copy of Francis Picabia's *L'adoration du Veau* (*The Adoration of the Calf*, 1943), which was based on a photograph by Erwin Blumenfeld from 1937. See, for example, Achim Hochdörfer, "How the World Came In," in *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age: Gesture and Spectacle, Eccentric Figuration, Social Networks*, eds. Achim Hochdörfer, David Joselit, and Manuela Ammer, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel Verlag / Museum Brandhorst; Vienna: Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2015), 15–27.
7. Paul Smith quoted in Amelia Jones, "Dis/playing the Phallus: Male Artists Perform Their Masculinities," *Art History* 17, no. 4 (December 1994): 546–84.
8. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," *October*, no. 130 (Fall 2009): 125–34. This quote, page 132.
9. For a brief but precise description of this work, see Kirsi Peltomäki, *Situation Aesthetics: The Work of Michael Asher* (Cambridge, MA / London: MIT Press, 2010), 88–90. For a discussion of Lawler's installation at Artists Space, see my essay "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum*, September 1982, reprinted in Buchloh, *Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth-Century Art* (Cambridge, MA / London: MIT Press, 2015), 173–226.
10. Jutta Koether, "Mad Garland," in *Art and Subjecthood. The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, eds. Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsch (Frankfurt am Main; Berlin: Städelschule; Sternberg Press, 2011), 81.
11. The authoritative interpretation of the pun *peigne* was delivered by Thierry de Duve in his magisterial study *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA / London: MIT Press, 1996), 213–25. But de Duve failed to recognize that when Duchamp decided to display this device of a common comb on the winter 1937 cover of *Transition* magazine, an important avant-garde journal edited by Eugène Jolas, its polemics against painting had become even more poignant and topical. This was not only for its derision of the equation between painting and male procreative and authorial (e.g. the pun on "hauteur") performances, but more precisely as a polemical intervention (yet unrecognized) in the raging debates about Surrealist automatist painting. With hindsight it could also count as an astonishing prognosis of the imminent myths emerging from post-automatist American painting, i.e., Jackson Pollock.
12. While Warhol was not as phobic towards the tint as Mondrian, who eliminated it completely from his color schemes precisely due to its apparently irrepressible referentiality to the organic conditions of nature, Warhol's paintings nevertheless deployed the color green relatively rarely. The first and few exceptions would be the small group of paintings of food stamps and dollar bills (1962), and only two of the *Death and Disaster* paintings, painted slightly later in 1962. And we also find three green variations among a dozen self-portraits in 1963.
13. At the same time, Koether's photograph of this assemblage of an obscene opposition against the hegemonic model of the readymade reconnects with the rising anthropomorphism and return to a fragmented figuration that Duchamp himself had initiated in 1937 with his design of the mannequin passages at the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in Paris. By the early 1990s only John Miller had tested the resurrection of this paradigm before it would yet again become one of the new ruling models of sculptural production in Thomas Hirschhorn's and Isa Genzken's work, as part of a new tendency to return to figuration under the conditions of "semiocapitalism." For a discussion of this reemergence of the artificial subject figure, see the very productive volume of essays edited by Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsch titled *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011). For a more detailed discussion of the actual historical constellation enacted in Duchamp's design of the Surrealist exhibition in 1938 where these types of shop-window mannequins and figures were first deployed as sculptural devices, see my essay "The Dialectics of Design and Destruction: The *Degenerate Art* Exhibition (1937) and the *Exposition internationale du Surréalisme* (1938)" in *October*, no. 150 (Fall 2014): 49–62.
14. Koether's obscene activation of the supposedly gender-neutral readymade seems to have resuscitated or enacted one of the additionally possible, but widely unrecognized, interpretations of Duchamp's attribution to R. Mutt as the author of the urinal that he submitted to the First Annual Exhibition in New York in 1917. That interpretation—in manifest distinction to those provided by Rosalind E. Krauss (i.e., Armut) or William Camfield (i.e., Mott Iron Works), or even Duchamp's own subsequently assigned explanation making a reference to the cartoon characters Mutt and Jeff—would argue that Duchamp, after having returned from his sojourn in Munich in 1916, would have known enough German to perform a wordplay on the word *Mutter*. Performing an operation on this most central of all words, according to the principle of Verlanization (the old secret-coding procedure of deviants and outsiders, and more recently of French youth culture), Duchamp broke *Mutter* into two parts and reassembled the syllables in inverted sequence. That interpretation would also take into account that Duchamp undoubtedly knew Alfred Jarry's infamous statement that "in order to be truly free, you have to piss on the grave of your mother."
15. Koether, "Figure of Paint," 135–37.
16. In her conversation with Isabelle Graw in 2011 ("Painting Abuse: A Conversation between Isabelle Graw and Jutta Koether," in *Jutta Koether.*

The Thirst, ed. Iris Müller-Westermann, exh. cat. [Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2011], 35), Koether comments on her motivations to paint these pictures while at the same time distancing herself from that period in her production and revising her positions in the present quite dramatically: "Back then my aim was to make the wrong sorts of impositions on the originals or to dismember them, and today I am returning to the specific palette I had introduced in the Eighties. You might say I was exclaiming 'I am red' back then—while also dismembering or mis-impositioning the classical originals. That endeavor was also a consequence of what was going on around me: the method or the discourses in which I was involved were defined by affirmative gestures. The aim was a certain impetuousness, the coarse register.... The way I negotiate the world now—a lot of time has passed since then, really, it has been twenty years—is very different. My genuine interest in the old originals is more historical now: how do I engage history and its trajectories at all, engage what painting has meant and still means today, how do I use these things?"

17. I am referring to Leo Steinberg's important essay "Resisting Cézanne: Picasso's Three Women," *Art in America*, November 1978, 114–33, which famously argued that Picasso's emphatic foregrounding of sexuality in the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* was partially motivated by his desire to break away from Cézanne's powerful influence. It would seem plausible, then, to recognize that Koether's evisceration of masculinist modes of painting would return precisely to that historical moment in a dialectical inversion of Picasso's principles, i.e., enlisting rather than resisting Cézanne.

18. Once again a comparison will clarify what might appear at first as a rather daring speculation: for Jasper Johns, the recovery of Cézanne's molecular brushstrokes had opened the road toward a degendering of the painterly process. After all, the act of painting had only been extremely gendered with the rise of post-Cubist Picasso mythologies, and with the equally mythical corroboration of painting as a masculinist act from Pollock to de Kooning, the very axis that Johns set out to derail.

19. Jutta Koether, *f.*, trans. Nicholas Mauss and Michael Sanchez (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 24.

20. Koether, *f.*, 27. It would be worthwhile to trace the various reconceptions of monochrome tendencies from the perspectives that Koether's painting has opened up. After the reference to early Cézanne, the only later example that comes to mind as a possible antecedent to Koether would be the relative reduction of the chromatics of painting to a variety of flesh tones and tints in Philip Guston's paintings of the 1960s. Guston's monochrome reductions equally seem to articulate a pathology of loss and lack turned into forms of resistance, and they would also represent the perfect counterexample to the simultaneous recoding of the monochrome as a tool of spectacularization, as it became strikingly obvious in the case of Yves Klein.

21. The first explicit and programmatic Cézanne paraphrases do not occur in Koether's work until 2005, in *Orchard (New York, Channeling Pontoise)*, or a year later, in a group of works titled *Änderungen aller Art* (*Alterations of All Kinds*).

22. The artist Mike Kelley observed early on that Koether's paintings were painted more like watercolors, stating in a conversation with the artist, "You are a painter and you paint gesturally—there is a lot of movement in your paintings, and one could say that there are expressionistic overtones. But the paint is applied thinly, almost like watercolor, which is very unusual relative to the German expressionist tradition." Kelley, "Koether," 100. Carol Armstrong has made that equation in a discussion of certain aspects of the medium in the context of Cézanne's watercolors: "Like still life, it tends to be relatively small in size. Like still life, it has something of the feminine about it. As with still life, moreover, its subjects are generally of low standing. And as with still life, so with watercolor: it is neither that genre nor that medium." See Carol Armstrong, ed., *Cézanne in the Studio: Still Life in Watercolors*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2004), 26.

23. The classic essay on the subject is Meyer Schapiro, "The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still Life," in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: G. Braziller, 1978), 1–38.

24. A fourth element asserting the painting's imposing presence would be the mirror installed behind it so that spectators would literally be haunted by the phallus's backside, a plain canvas on a stretcher, disrupting the specular adventure rather than intensifying the suturing effect, as Jacques-Louis David had famously done in the first exhibition of his *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799) by juxtaposing the painting with a mirror. For a discussion of David's mirror device, see the exquisite account in Ewa Lajer-Burcharth's *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven, CT / London: Yale University Press, 1999), 132ff.

25. Brancusi's friends published a letter in support of the artist in *Le Journal du Peuple* (February 25, 1920) to protest the authorities' decision to remove the sculpture from the exhibition. According to some accounts, it was Picasso, and to others, Matisse, who publicly called out the work as "a phallus"—manifestly opposing Brancusi's explicit denial. For the best account of the sculpture and the scandal see chapter three, "Princess X / Prince's Sex: Repositioning Gender," in Anna C. Chave, *Constantin Brancusi: Shifting the Bases of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 93–97.

26. Koether would also have known the various explicitly phallic drawings of screwing tools by Judith Bernstein and Lee Lozano, made in Chicago starting in the mid-1960s, but it's not possible to develop here an iconographic history of the representation of the phallus starting in ancient cultures, or in sixteenth-century images like Francesco Salviati's *Triumph of the Phallus* (almost a direct if most likely an unknown model for Koether's depiction), necessary and desirable as that might be.

27. Ironically, there is at least one earlier example in which Koether allowed the armature of de-skilling behind which she had been hiding for many years to break down. That is the dorsal portrait of a cat in the "winter" painting, part of "The Seasons" (2011), drawn and modeled with equal finesse. The cat, with its multiple mythical and art historical charges, from Egypt to Baudelaire's poem "Les Chats" to Manet's *Olympia* in 1863, reappears here. Rather than an eroticized animal, it is here the portrait of a spectator/subject, if not the female painter/author. With her proud spine manifestly exposed, it is most likely a self-portrait of the artist looking at her own painting with a certain degree of bewilderment and satisfaction at the level of skillful painterly execution that she has finally permitted herself and legitimately presented.

28. Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, eds., *Louise Bourgeois, Destruction of the Father / Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews* (Cambridge, MA / London: MIT Press, 1998), 101 (translation revised).

29. Koether, *f.*, 15.

30. Jacques Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus" [1958], in *Psychoanalysis and Gender*, ed. Rosalind Minsky (Routledge, London/New York 1996), 274.

31. Mignon Nixon, "Bad Enough Mother," *October*, no. 71 (Winter 1995): 85.

32 Smith as quoted in Jones, "Dis/Playing the Phallus," 572.

33. Jutta Koether, "Walk-in Collage: Ein Gang durch New Yorker Ausstellungen" ("Walk-in collage: A New York Exhibition Tour"), *Texte zur Kunst*, June 2002, 144.